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FEATURING
SARAH JESSICA PARKER,
GIRLS ALOUD, STRICTLY'S
PASHA AND MUCH MORE



YOUR MASSIVE GUIDE TO

2024

PLUS WHERE TO SPEND
NEW YEAR'S EVE

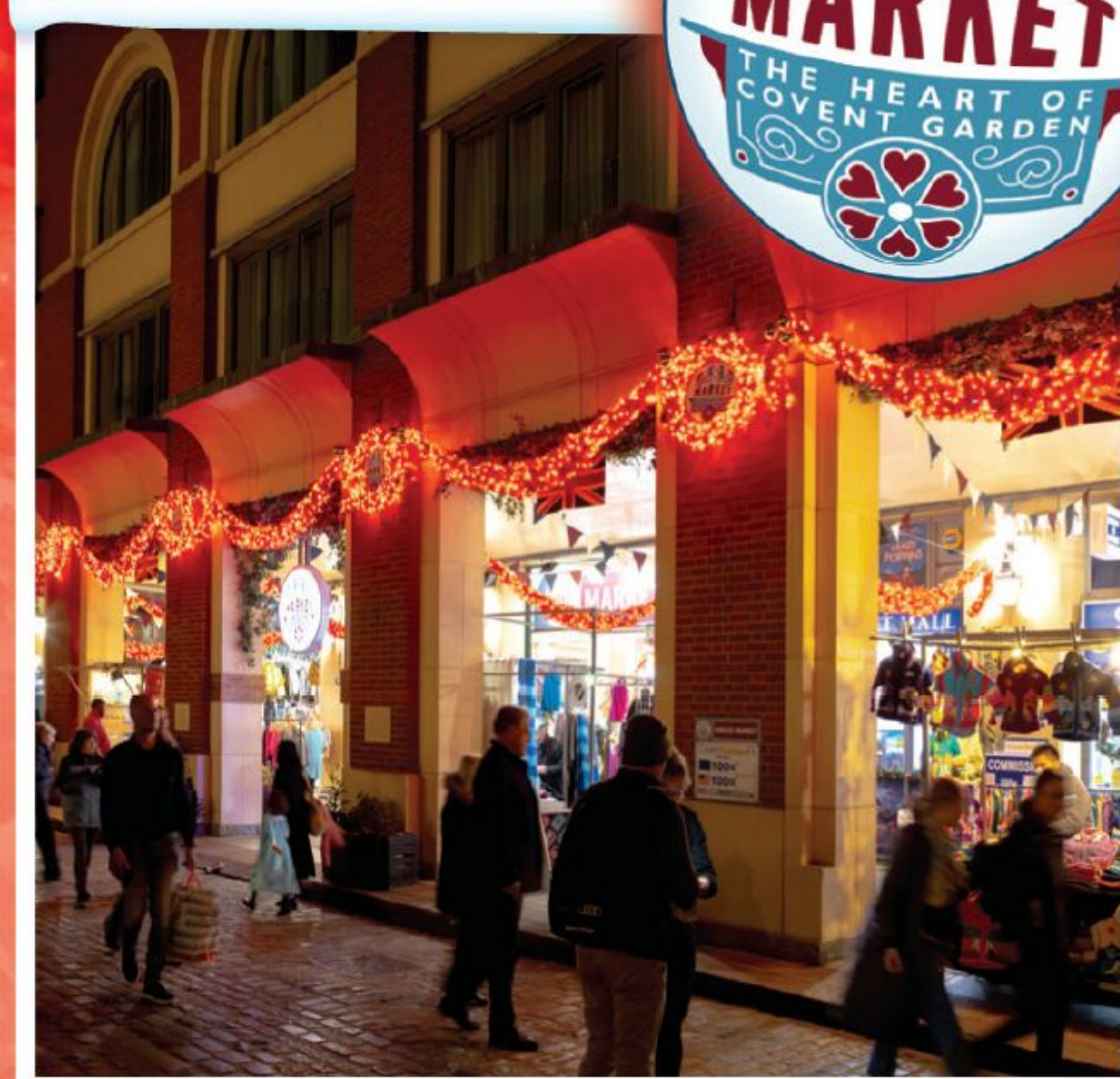
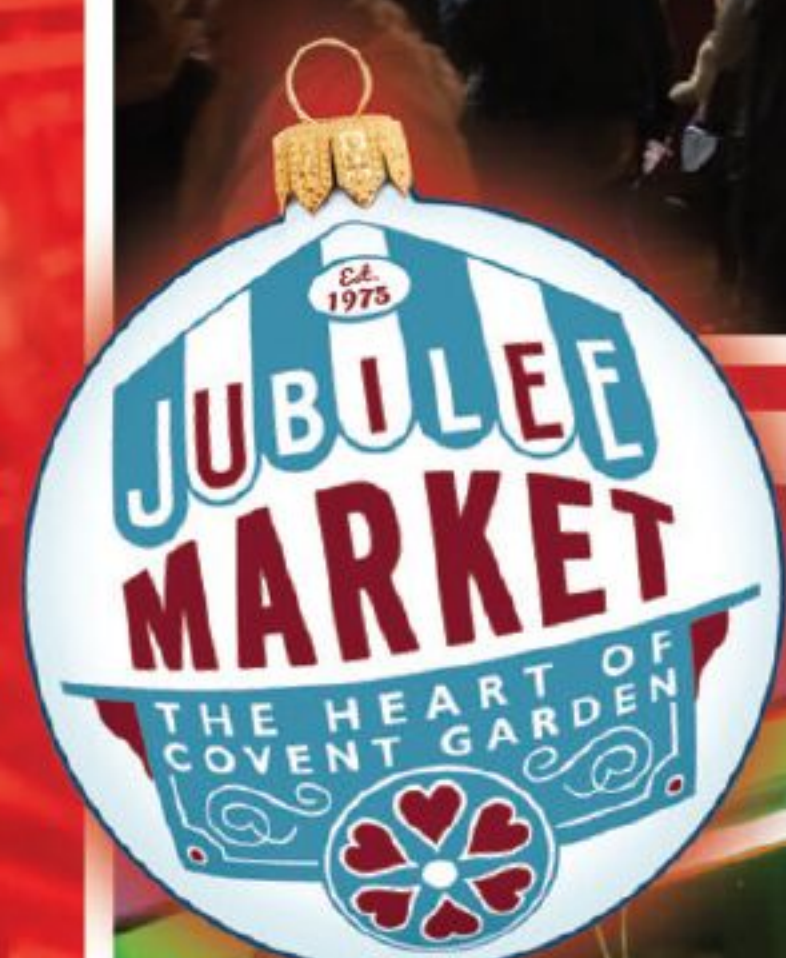
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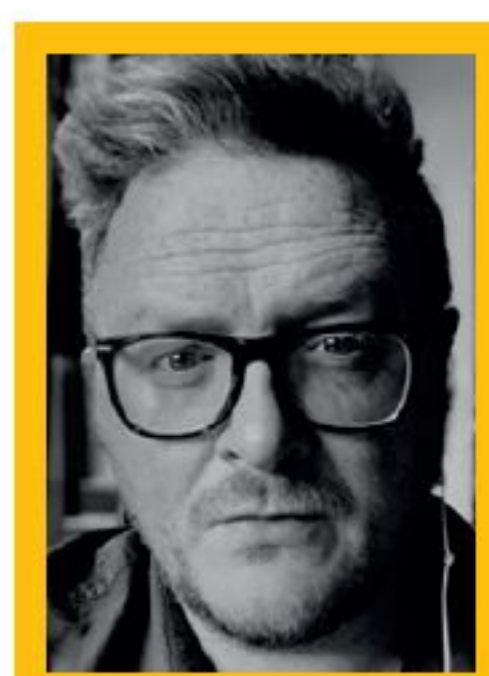
IN&AROUND covent garden

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2024



London is set to welcome in 2024 in spectacular style

Where does the time go? It feels like yesterday when we waved goodbye to 2022. And here we are again, launching into a brand new year. And yet again, there is a lot to look forward as the West End gears up to launch some truly exciting shows. Not only can we look forward to some major shows like stage versions of *Cruel Intentions*, *Mean Girls* and *Burlesque*, huge stars like Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick are flying into London to star in Neil Simon's hysterical *Plaza Suite* at the Savoy. But this is just one of the many productions that has wet our whistle. In this issue, we look forward to the next 12 months, which will see the return of Girls Aloud



and Britpop band Rialto, plus we chat to former *Strictly* star Pasha Kovalev and West End star Tobias Turley, who chats about his *Mamma Mia!* Have A Dream experience.

Christian Guilteneane Editor

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checklist

Previews of what's coming in 2024 along with what to enjoy right now



Things to see in 2024

What a year 2023 has been for the West End. Not only did *Cabaret* continue to pack houses, brand new shows like *Mrs Doubtfire* and *The Motive And The Cue* as well as revivals like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Guys & Dolls* and the very radical reworking of the Andrew Lloyd Webber classic *Sunset Boulevard* proved to be popular with audiences and critics alike. So what can we look forward to in 2024? Well, there are plenty of shows headed our way, and once again, the West End will play host to many productions based on big screen classics. But more of that later. First up...



Plaza Suite

The West End always attracts A-list stars to its stages, but we couldn't be more excited to see *Sex & The City* legend Sarah Jessica Parker and her husband Matthew Broderick in a new production of Neil Simon's razor-sharp classic romantic play *Plaza Suite*. In it they play three very different couples who check into a suite at the Plaza in New York. We meet Karen and Sam, a jaded married couple trying to save their relationship; Muriel and Jesse, former high school sweethearts who book in to enjoy a rather steamy weekend; and Norma and Roy, parents of a bride-to-be, who are desperately trying to coax their nearlywed daughter out of the bathroom.

Where: Savoy Theatre, Savoy Court, The Strand, London WC2R 0ET

When: January 17 to March 31

CLUELESS

The Musical

BASED ON JANE AUSTEN'S CLASSIC EMMA

Clueless

Those of us old enough to remember the '90s will be beside themselves to discover that the classic Amy Heckerling teen comedy is being transformed into a musical. Loosely based on Jane Austen's *Emma*, the 1995 movie starred Alicia Silverstone as fashion queen Cher Horowitz, who takes on the challenge of giving her best pal a makeover to impress a boy. The movie was a hit and spawned a Broadway musical back in 2018, with songs from the '80s and '90s. But this new version, which premieres in the UK with an exclusive two-week developmental run at Bromley's Churchill Theatre, will feature music by BRIT Award-winning singer-songwriter KT Tunstall and lyrics by Grammy winner and three-time Tony Award nominee Glenn Slater.

Where: Churchill Theatre, High Street, Bromley BR1 1HA

When: February 12-24

Lucie Jones

She's pulled at our heartstrings in *Waitress The Musical*, thrilled us in *Wicked* and even filled us with pride when she represented the UK at Eurovision... Lucie Jones has come a long way since *The X Factor*. Next spring, she takes a step away from starring in musicals to go it alone with a fantastic solo show, where she will sing tunes from the shows and much more.

Where: Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ

When: May 12

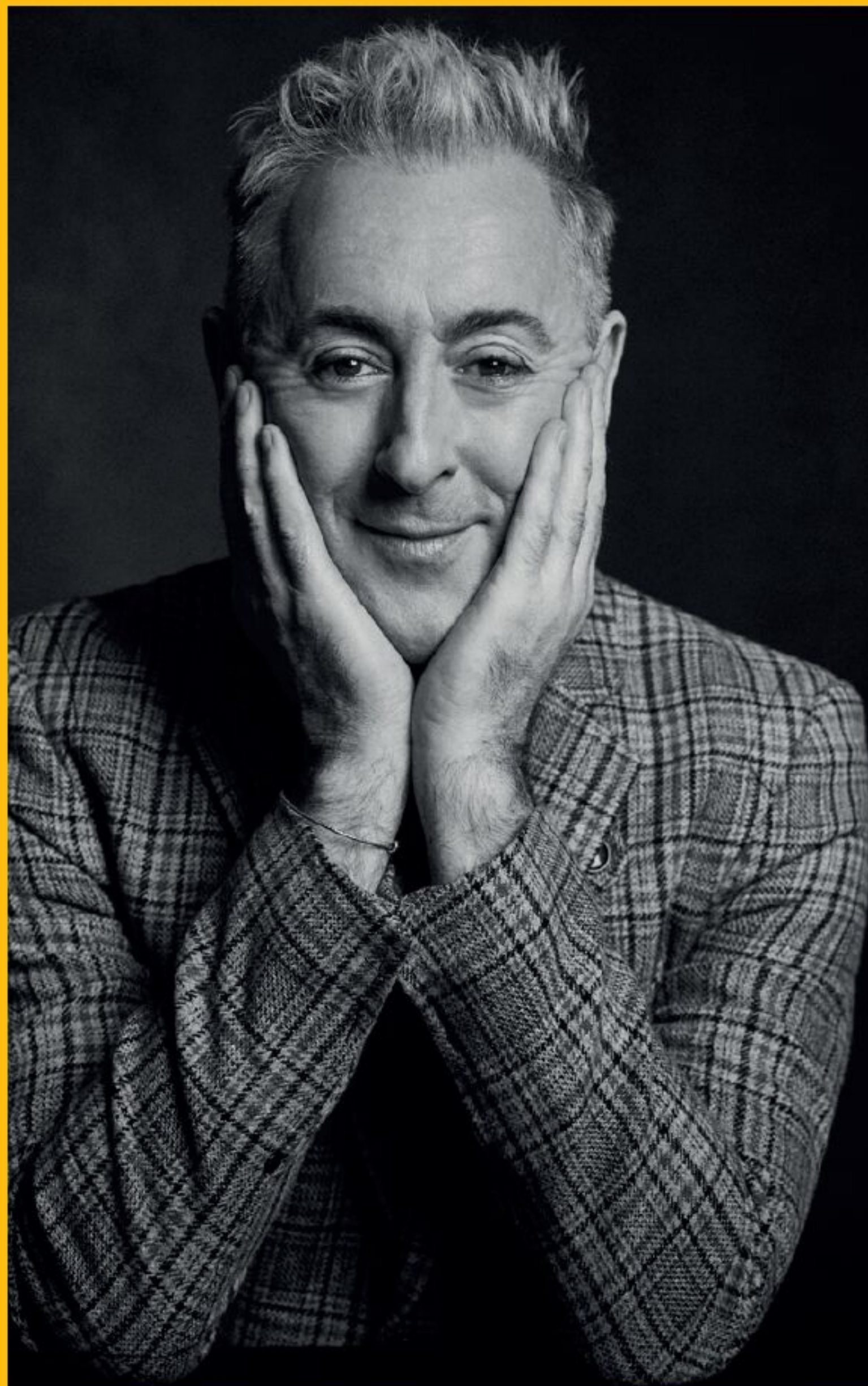


The Time Traveller's Wife

This heart-warming epic opened in late 2023 and was an immediate hit. Based on the film, which in turn was inspired by Audrey Niffenegger's best-selling novel, this is a charming tale about loving couple Henry and Clare, whose relationship is put to the ultimate test as one half – Henry – cannot stay in the same place for long due to the fact he has a rare genetic disorder that causes him to travel through time. Music comes courtesy of Joss Stone and Dave Stewart.

Where: Apollo Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1D 7EZ

When: Currently booking until March 30 2024



Alan Cumming Is Not Acting His Age

Alan Cumming likes nothing more than to chat about this, that and the other. In this one-man show, the *Romy And Michele's High School Reunion* star covers all bases and chats about sex, death and bacchanalia (that's debauchery, to anyone reaching for a dictionary!). With his talents extending beyond acting, Alan will be punctuating his chat with a delicious set list of tunes including ditties by Cabaret songwriters Kander and Ebb, contemporary favourites and even a tune he wrote himself about plastic surgery.

Where: Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Catherine St, London WC2B 5JF

When: January 15-16

Burlesque

With its sassy visuals, pulsating music and incredible vocals from Christina Aguilera and Cher, it comes as no surprise that big screen favourite *Burlesque* finally transfers to the stage as a glittering musical. Steven Antin, who penned and shot the movie, takes the reins of the show and is joined by Aguilera in the role of exec producer. 'To say that I'm excited is an understatement. "Peel me off the ceiling" is more accurate,' Antin says. 'Getting *Burlesque The Musical* to the stage has been an ambition and a dream of mine for over ten years. I'm working with the best creative and producing team in the world, and we are all beyond thrilled that Christina has chosen to come on board as executive producer. It's a privilege to be working with her again. Her unrivalled experience, intuition and artistry continues to elevate everything. So exciting to be on this new journey with Xtina.' The musical will feature many of the classic songs from the movie – some of which were written by Diane Warren and Sia – while fierce choreographer Todrick Hall and Jess Folley will supply extra songs. While the show is being premiered in Manchester, there is talk of a UK tour and London residency. Watch this space.

Where: Manchester Opera House, 3 Quay St, Manchester M3 3HP

When: June 13-29



More new West End delights for 2024...

Back To The Future

The award-winning smash hit musical based on the classic '80s film is well worth a visit if you haven't already – and even if you have! For the uninitiated, the story is about Marty McFly, a rock 'n' roll teenager who is accidentally transported back to 1955 in a time-travelling DeLorean invented by Dr Emmett Brown. But before he can return to 1985, Marty is forced to interfere in the lives of his school-aged parents so they can fall in love and eventually bring him into existence. The show is produced by Colin Ingram, Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale, the creators of the three Back To The Future films. The cast is led by Ben Joyce as Marty McFly and Cory English as Doc Brown.

Where: Adelphi Theatre, Strand, London WC2R 0NS

When: Now booking until July 2024



Angels Of The North

The final three contestants on season five of Drag Race UK were the funniest the series has ever seen. Ginger Johnson, Michael Marouli and Tomara Thomas were not only beautifully painted, they fired out gags like they were going out of fashion and charmed RuPaul and the judges. Now the girls have teamed up for a UK tour, stopping off in London in April.

Where: O2 Shepherds Bush Empire, Shepherd's Bush Green, London W12 8TT

When: April 18



Tina: The Tina Turner Musical

In May 2023, we lost Tina Turner and the world sobbed at the loss of a talented and legendary recording artist who was responsible for some of the greatest rock songs to have hit the charts. While we will never hear her sing again, we can at least find solace in this stunning and emotional musical that details Tina's difficult rise to superstardom. Unflinchingly honest and packed with classic songs that Tina made famous, this is a wonderful way to pay tribute to the singer who made the whole world sing.

Where: Aldwych Theatre, 47 Aldwych, London WC2B 4DR

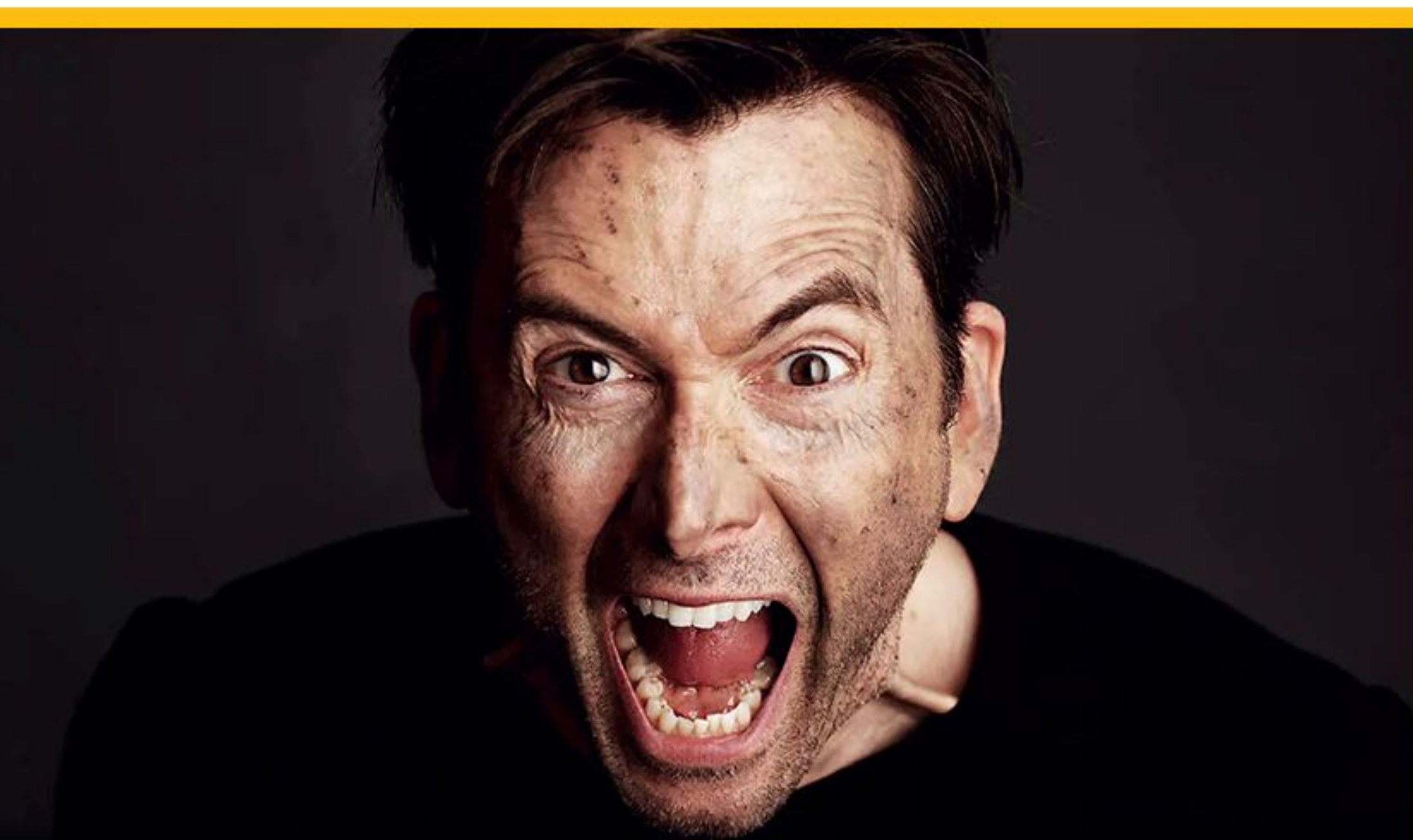
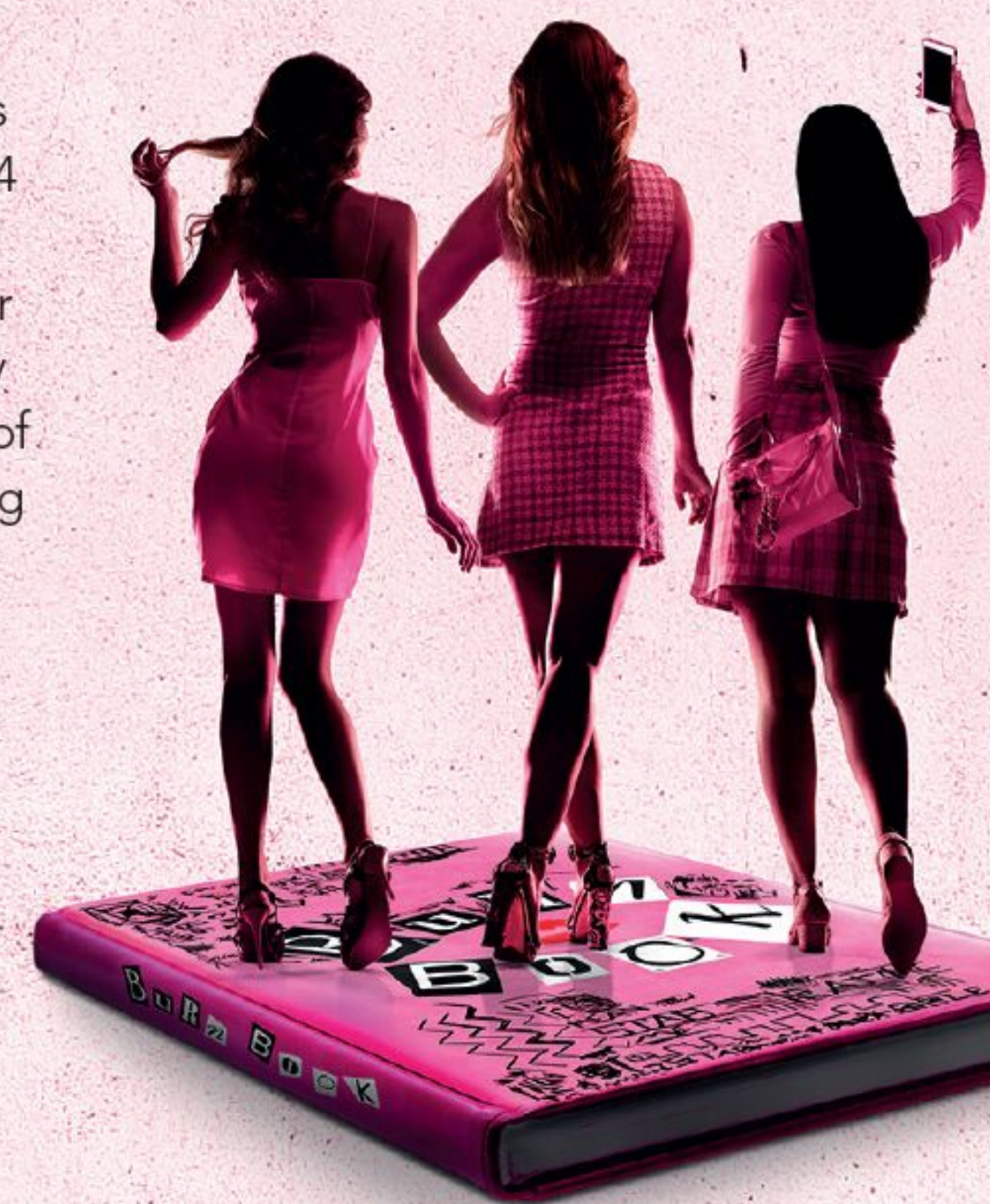
When: Until September 2024

Mean Girls

Another cult movie gets the stage treatment – this time it's Mean Girls, based on the 2004 teen comedy starring Lindsay Lohan. Similar in plot to the far superior movie Heathers (only with a softer edge), this story of homeschooler Cady attending her first ever high school and being sworn into the popular clique the Plastics was a huge success upon its release and became a Broadway smash in 2018. Six years on, the show premieres in the UK in June.

When: Open June 5 2024

Where: Savoy Theatre, Savoy Court, The Strand, London WC2R 0ET



Macbeth

We saw him return as Doctor Who in the 60th anniversary episodes, but now David Tennant is playing his first Shakespearean villain on stage. With his impeccable acting, expect to feel the urge to hiss and boo (but restrain yourself, this isn't panto!), while probably finding him devilishly attractive at the same time.

Where: Donmar Warehouse, 41 Earlham Street, Seven Dials, London WC2H 9LX

When: Until February 10

Sister Act

What's occurin'? Fans of sitcom Gavin & Stacey will be pleased to hear that Ruth Jones is to make her West End debut as Mother Superior in Sister Act, played in the film version by Dame Maggie Smith. She will be joining Beverley Knight in the production, who plays Deloris van Cartier, a sassy disco diva who is packed off to a convent for her protection after she witnesses a murder. From June 10, Beverley will be replaced in the role by X Factor superstar Alexandra Burke.

Where: Dominion Theatre, 268-269 Tottenham Ct Rd, London W1T 7AQ

When: March 15 – June 8



An Officer And A Gentleman

When fearless young officer candidate Zack Mayo meets captivating Paula Pokrifki, whose fiery spirit matches his own, a passionate love is in the air. Based on the classic Richard Gere movie of the same name, this touching story of love, courage and redemption will make your heart soar and leave you breathless and longing for more. It's set to a smash-hit soundtrack featuring tunes from Madonna, Bon Jovi, Cyndi Lauper, Blondie and, of course, the iconic (Love Lift Us) Up Where We Belong.

Where: April 1-6 (as part of a UK tour)

When: New Wimbledon Theatre, 93 The Broadway, London SW19 1QG



Bronco Billy

Bronco Billy is yet another stage adaptation of a movie, this time a Clint Eastwood flick about a cowboy and his bunch of Wild Westerners trying to make a dollar with their travelling show. That's until everything is derailed after Billy comes across New York heiress Antoinette Lily, who is running for her life. Emily Benjamin plays Antoinette with Tarinn Callender in the title role. They are joined by Victoria Hamilton-Barritt as Constance, Gemma Atkins as Dee Dee and many more.

Where: Charing Cross Theatre, The Arches, Villiers St, London WC2N 6NL

When: January 23 to April 7



Johannes Radebe: House Of Jojo

He may have recently topped the Sunday Times bestseller list with his autobiography, but Johannes Radebe is back doing what he does best. Now Strictly Come Dancing has finished for another year, you are no doubt desperate to see the lean, mean, strutting machine shaking his tush on the dancefloor. Following the phenomenal success of his first two sell-out UK and Ireland tours, Johannes will descend on the Palladium for the first time with his new show. Expect wild characters, tight choreography, dazzling costumes and some surprises.

Where: London Palladium, 8 Argyll St, London W1F 7TF

When: May 4



The Unfriend

Not a brand new show, but this wicked comedy by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat proved so popular in 2023 that it has found a new home in 2024 at the Wyndham's Theatre. While Frances Barber returns as the lusty, Trump-loving widow Elsa, she is joined by Lee Mack as Peter and Sarah Alexander as his wife Debbie. For those who haven't seen it, Peter and Debbie are on holiday where they meet Elsa, who then invites herself to stay with them. However, before she arrives they discover she may be more dangerous than just the off-colour comments she makes. Speaking about the enduring success of the show, Mark Gatiss has said: 'You can't keep a good serial killer down! I'm absolutely delighted that Elsa Jean Krakowski has found a home at the beautiful Wyndham's Theatre.'

Where: Wyndham's Theatre, Charing Cross Rd, London WC2H 0DA

When: Until March 6

There's plenty more to enjoy in 2024



The Hunger Games

If the celebrated books by Suzanne Collins and their subsequent big screen adaptations weren't enough, now futuristic fantasy favourite *The Hunger Games* will be coming to the London stage next autumn. Set in the dystopian world of Panem, *The Hunger Games* focuses on a group of disillusioned teenagers from tough parts of town who have been gathered together to battle it out in a contest to entertain the Capitol's aristocracy. However, Katniss Everdeen isn't happy about her situation and takes on the Capitol's tyranny with a rebellion throughout Panem.

Where: Stay up to date by visiting thehungergamesonstage.com

When: Autumn 2024



The Hills Of California

Celebrated writer Jez Butterworth has penned a new show that will play a strictly limited run at the Harold Pinter Theatre from January. The production is set in Blackpool in 1976, when the UK experienced its driest summer in 200 years. While the town is awash with sun worshippers, the Webb sisters return to their dying mother's guest house. Director Sam Mendes once again teams up with Butterworth, with whom he worked on *The Ferryman* in 2017, which won them Olivier Awards for Best New Play and Best Director.

Where: Harold Pinter Theatre, Panton St, London SW1Y 4DN

When: From January 27

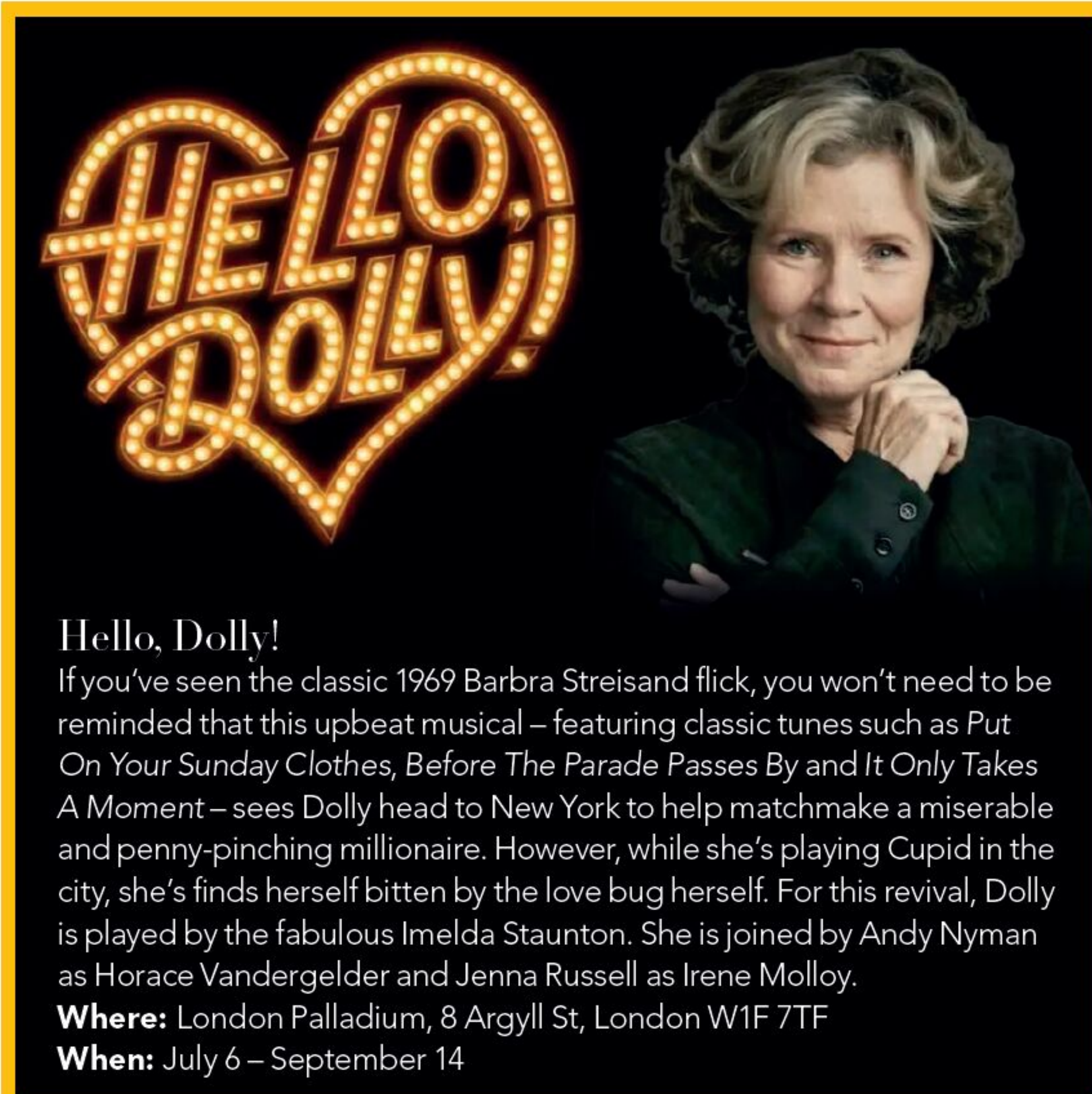


An Enemy Of The People

Matt Smith returns to the West End stage in this modern revival of Ibsen's classic drama about scientist called Dr Stockmann, who finds himself at odds with some locals after they refuse to take action when he discovers that there is something amiss in the waters of the local and very lucrative spa! This version is the English-language premiere of German director Thomas Ostermeier's production, which is noted for its town hall section in which the audience get to debate the ethics of the play with Dr Stockmann.

Where: Duke of York's Theatre, St Martin's Ln, London WC2N 4BG

When: February 6 – April 6



Hello, Dolly!

If you've seen the classic 1969 Barbra Streisand flick, you won't need to be reminded that this upbeat musical – featuring classic tunes such as *Put On Your Sunday Clothes*, *Before The Parade Passes By* and *It Only Takes A Moment* – sees Dolly head to New York to help matchmake a miserable and penny-pinching millionaire. However, while she's playing Cupid in the city, she's finds herself bitten by the love bug herself. For this revival, Dolly is played by the fabulous Imelda Staunton. She is joined by Andy Nyman as Horace Vandergelder and Jenna Russell as Irene Molloy.

Where: London Palladium, 8 Argyll St, London W1F 7TF

When: July 6 – September 14

The Little Big Things

Already a hit with audiences and critics, this gentle musical based on the best-selling memoir by Henry Fraser has been extended until March. The book and the show retell the true story of how artist Fraser and his family banded together after he was involved in a life-altering diving accident at the age of 17. Paralysed from the shoulders down, the youngster – who had fallen out of love with creativity – once again found his enthusiasm and battled against the odds to continue to make art using his mouth.

Where: @sohoplace, 4 Soho Place, Charing Cross Road W1D 3BG

When: Until March 2



Spirited Away

If you're looking for something enchanting and otherworldly, then you're sure to be captivated by this stunning stage adaptation of Hayao Miyazaki's Oscar-winning animated film *Spirited Away* – reimagined for the stage by Olivier and Tony Award-winning director John Caird. The original Japanese cast perform alongside puppets amid dazzling sets, while a live orchestra recreates the sumptuous score by Joe Hisaishi from the film.

Where: London Coliseum, St Martin's Lane WC2N 4ES

When: April 30 – August 24



JUST FOR ONE DAY

THE LIVE AID MUSICAL

26 Jan – 30 Mar 2024

Just For One Day

These days, you really can put anything on stage. If it's not transporting a big screen tale to the confines of a theatre then it's reliving events that have captured the public imagination. Who can forget the wickedly brilliant Wagatha Christie play and the recent *The Interview*, which looks at the notorious interview Martin Bashir conducted with Diana, Princess of Wales? Now we have a play that will take us back to 1985's legendary Live Aid concert, with 26 performers playing the people who took part and using the music of the artists who performed.

Where: The Old Vic, The Cut, London SE1 8NB

When: January 26 to March 30



Macbeth

You wait ages for a production of *Macbeth* and then two come along at once. In this version, Ralph Fiennes and Indra Varma play the main characters in a production directed by Simon Godwin that will tour warehouses in Liverpool, Edinburgh, London and Washington DC.

Where: Dock X, Canada Water, Canada Water Retail park, Surrey Quays, London SE16 2XU

When: February 10 – March 23

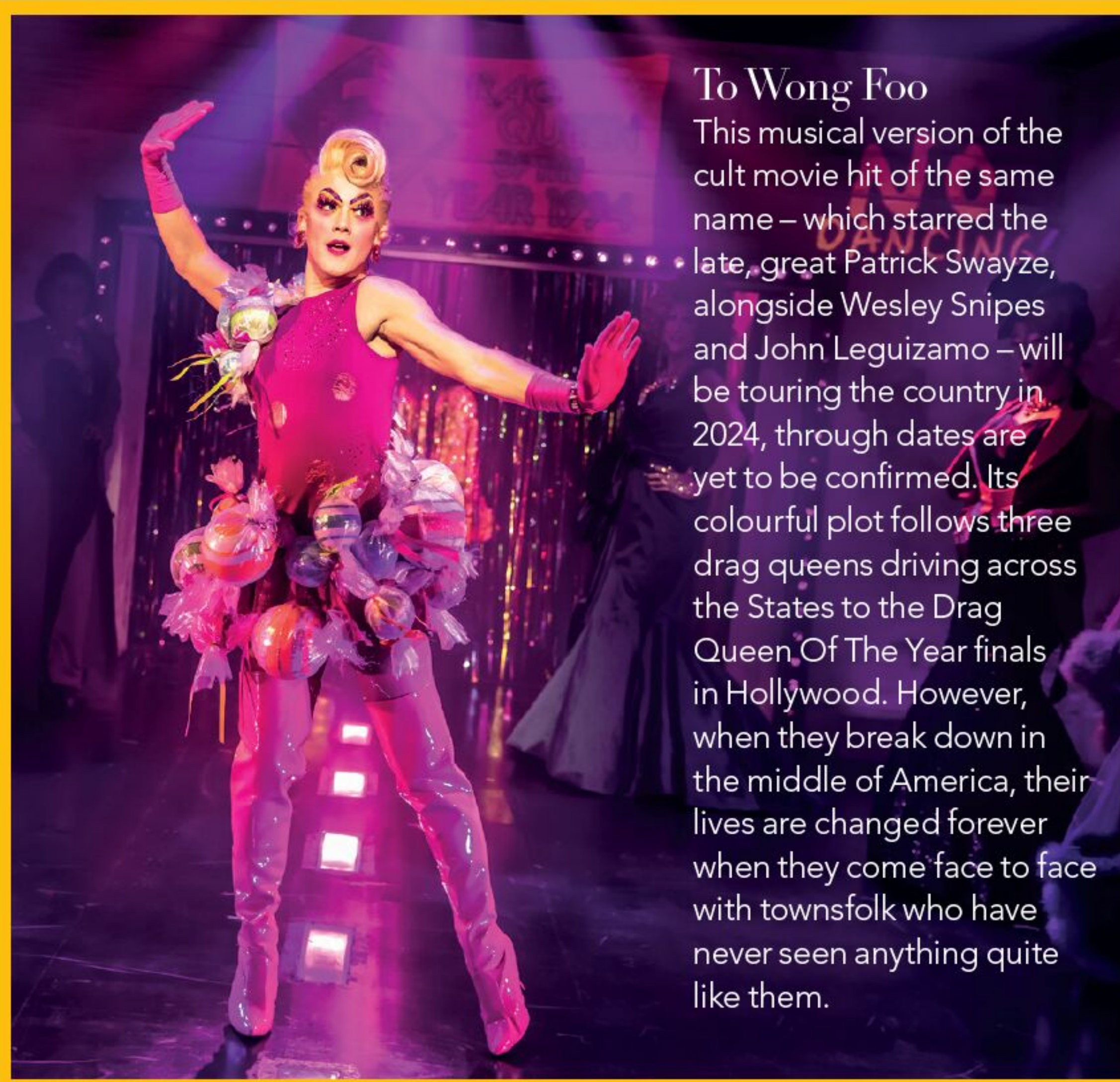


Long Day's Journey Into Night

This Eugene O'Neill play is set in August 1912 and follows a single day in the life of the Tyrone family, as they discuss their own shortcomings and take each other to task. This semi-autobiographical tale won O'Neill a posthumous Pulitzer Prize in 1957 after he insisted that the play not be performed in his lifetime.

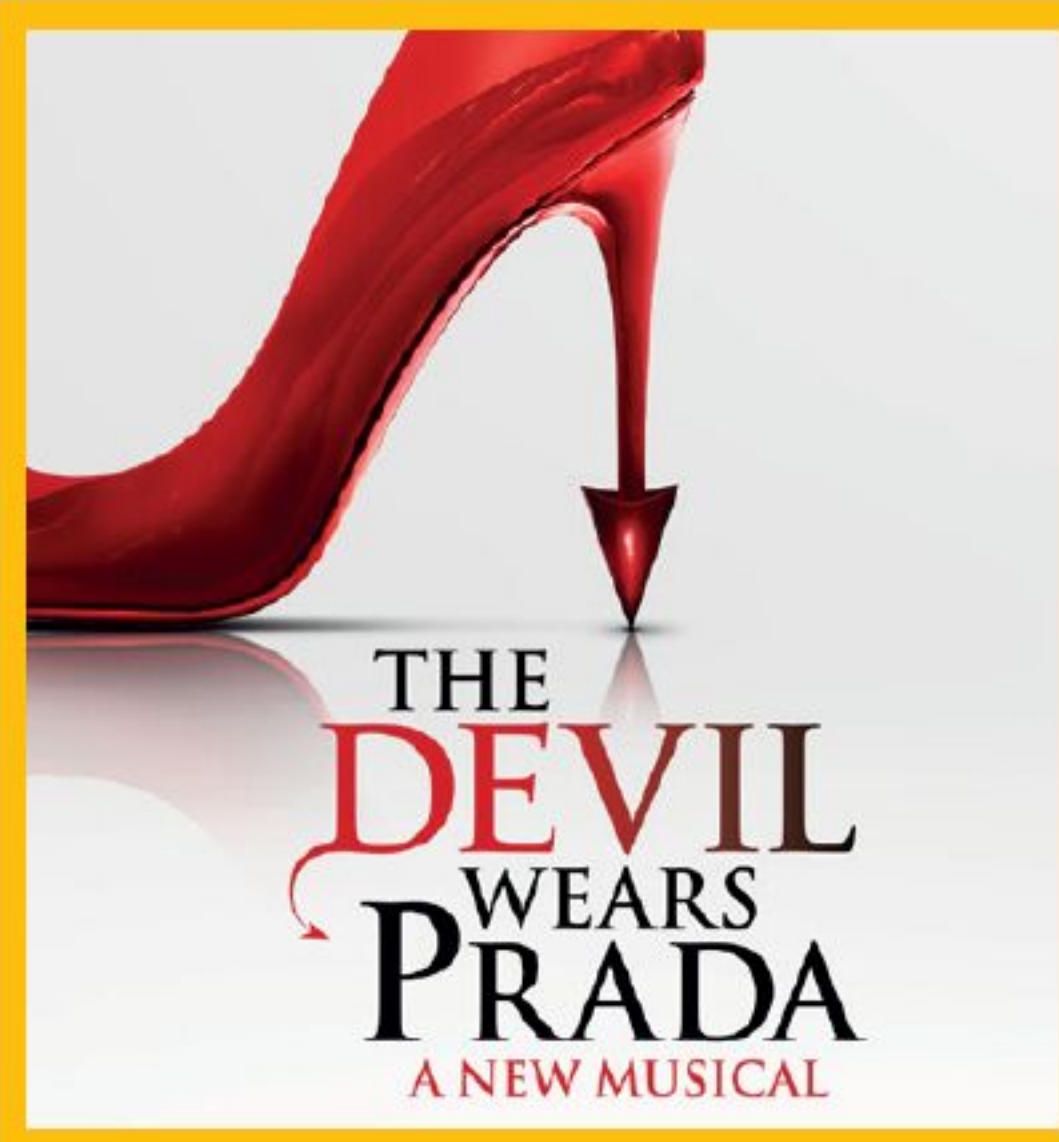
Where: Wyndham's Theatre, Charing Cross Rd, London WC2H 0DA

When: March 19 – June 8



To Wong Foo

This musical version of the cult movie hit of the same name – which starred the late, great Patrick Swayze, alongside Wesley Snipes and John Leguizamo – will be touring the country in 2024, through dates are yet to be confirmed. Its colourful plot follows three drag queens driving across the States to the Drag Queen Of The Year finals in Hollywood. However, when they break down in the middle of America, their lives are changed forever when they come face to face with townsfolk who have never seen anything quite like them.



The Devil Wears Prada

It's odd that after the huge success of the super stylish 2006 big screen satire of the fashion industry – based on the bestselling Lauren Weisberger book – it has taken so long for it to hit the stage. It was originally due to appear in 2020, but it was postponed due to the pandemic. When it did premiere in Chicago in 2022, Sir Elton John – who wrote the music – considered the show unready, so withdrew it to tweak it. Now, a year on, we finally get to see the show as Elton had originally planned it. It will preview in Edinburgh, then move to London.

Where: Dominion Theatre, 268-269 Tottenham Ct Rd, London W1T 7AQ

When: October 24 – May 31 2025



The Picture Of Dorian Gray

We all know the very talented Sarah Snook from the mega series *Succession*, but this Aussie is no stranger to the London stage. In 2016 she wowed audiences in the Old Vic's revival of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. Now she's returning to the West End in this new retelling of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*. Not only is she the lead actress, she's the only actor in the entire show, playing every role. Originally staged in Sydney in 2020, it's been described as a technically dazzling extravaganza that uses video and on stage cameras to tell the story.

Where: Leicester Square, 6 Leicester Pl, London WC2H 7BX

When: January 23 – April 13



Police Cops: The Musical

Set in the USA in 1980, an era when men squeezed themselves into tight jeans, tore around the streets in fast cars and sported some mighty fine face fuzz, *Police Cops* tells the story of a pair of mismatched cops trying to hunt down the baddest cat in America! This show started life at the Edinburgh Fringe but enjoyed a riotous run at the Southwark Playhouse in 2023, where critics declared it 'hilarious', 'bonkers' and 'dazzling'. If you missed it, fear not – catch the all singing, all dancing, all guns blazing extravaganza at the Playhouse, this time with new music by A1 hunk Ben Adams.

Where: Southwark Playhouse Elephant, 1 Dante Pl, London SE11 4RX

When: March 1 – April 20



Cruel Intentions

Yet another movie gets the musical treatment – this one is based on the movie starring Ryan Phillippe and Sarah Michelle Gellar as the snooty Upper East Side toffs who manipulate innocents around them with their wealth and sexual prowess. If the script is anything like the film, it will be fizzing with barbs. The music is a jukebox of cool '90s tunes like The Verve's *Bittersweet Symphony*, REM's *Losing My Religion*, Natalie Imbruglia's *Torn*, *NSYNC's *Bye Bye Bye*, Britney Spears' *Sometimes* and many more.

Where: The Other Palace, 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JA

When: January 11 – April 14

Society photographer **Edward Lloyd's**

Diary News

Chain of Hope Gala Ball



Michelle Heaton
and Hugh Hanley

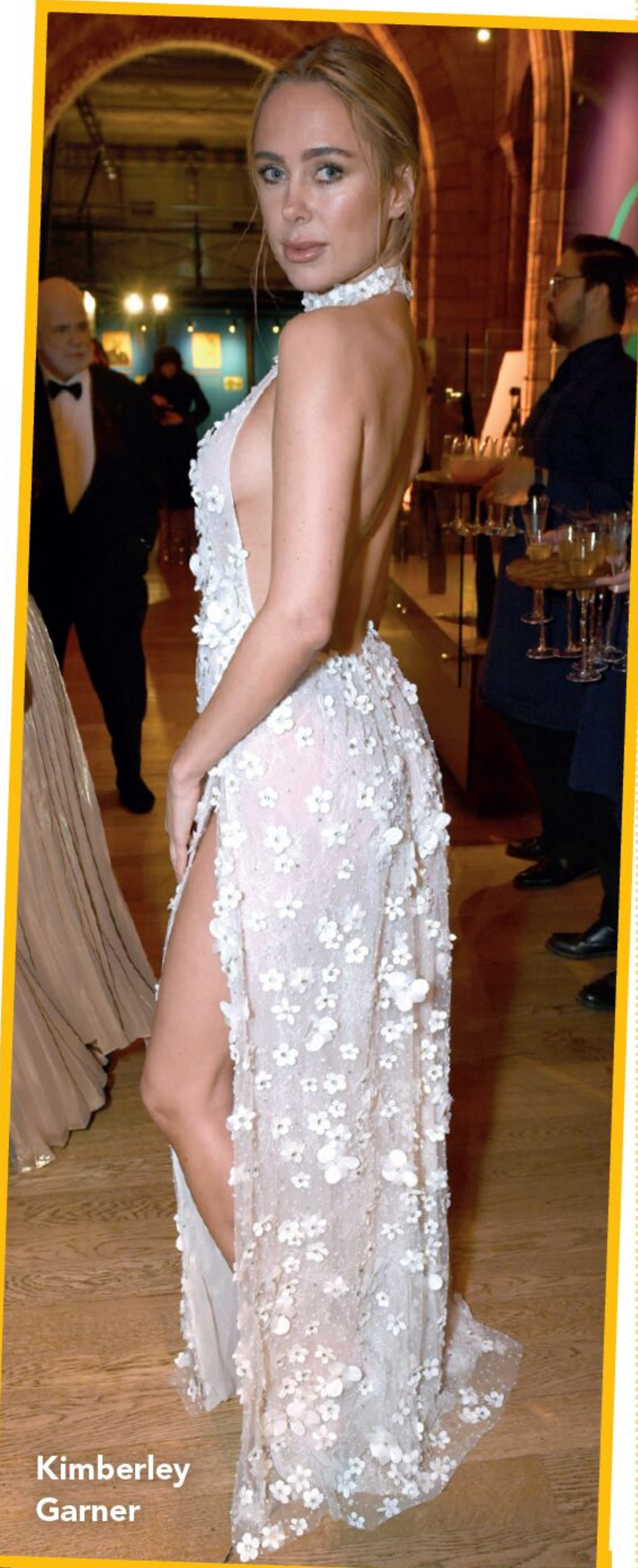
The Natural History Museum in London's Kensington was the glamorous venue for the Chain of Hope Gala Ball, with many of the VIP guests flying into London especially for the event. Chain of Hope founder Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub and CEO Emma Scanlan welcomed guests to a champagne reception amid the exhibits at the museum. The ball celebrates the work of the eminent heart surgeons who help children in desperate need of heart treatments, and raises funds for the charity.

Guests dined in the impressive Hintze Hall, and wine under the huge

skeleton of Hope the blue whale, hanging from the ceiling. Entertainment was led by Egyptian soprano Fatma Said and Joss Stone, while Lord Jeffrey Archer conducted the auction.

The success of the evening was down to the tireless work of the Gala Ball Committee, led by co-chairs Sherine Sawiris and Dina Roushdi and vice chairs Maria Sukkar and Cherine Helmy.

Chain of Hope, founded by heart surgeon Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub in 1995, sees doctors and surgeons volunteer their time, to lead Chain of Hope missions and treat children referred to the charity.



Kimberley
Garner



Vanessa Feltz



Shelley Smith and
Laura Hamilton



Lady Susan
Hammond and Lord
Philip Hammond



Nadhim Zahawi MP
and his wife Lana



Fiona Hawthorne
and Colin Salmon



Virginia and
Martin Offiah



Joss Stone



Strictly's Nadiya
Bychkova and
Kai Widdrington

new for 2024

WASIA PROJECT

Meet the brother and sister band set to win your hearts in 2024

These days, a lot of younger music stars share their innermost thoughts via very plaintive, ethereal-sounding songs. Take Billie Eilish, for example, who has made a career out of producing moody lo-fi ballads that can sound so intense you feel like you need to lie down in a dark room. Now a couple of young siblings from Croydon – William Gao and Olivia Hardy – are about to become the next big thing, thanks to their growing armoury of beautifully moody jazz-tinged ear-caresses. The pair have been releasing critically acclaimed music since 2019 but 2024 looks set to see them breaking through, having confirmed a UK tour with dates in Brighton, Birmingham, Glasgow, Newcastle and London's Heaven on February 28.

Right now, you may think you haven't come across Wasia Project, but if you are a fan of the Netflix smash *Heartstopper* you'll have heard their track *ur so pretty*, used on the soundtrack in season two. You will also recognise William as Tao from the same show.

But before you think William has landed a music deal just because he's been on a hit telly show, stop – Wasia Project was the brainchild of both him and his sister, long before he landed the part.

Music was always important to the pair, with Olivia learning to play violin and William the piano. With their shared love of tunes, they eventually decided to form a band and write and produce their own music together.

'We're both entering this journey and establishing the sounds we want to create together with the person we trust the most,' Olivia told *NME* of her relationship with her brother. 'It's quite magical.'

And magical it is indeed. If you listen to their enchanting single *Remember When*, you will hear a fragility that is utterly haunting. Olivia's ethereal vocals blend beautifully with the infectious melodies.

Check out their tracks on Spotify and let us furnish you with some handy info about the band that will impress your friends when you tell them about the hottest new act of 2024...

They love ABBA

While the music they produce is feather-lite in sound, the pair – who are classically trained – admit that aside from music by the greats, their early influences are a lot more upbeat, citing ABBA as one of the main ones. 'Their music underscored our childhood,' William says. 'We would dance around to ABBA, Queen, Frank Sinatra. We realise that keeping an open ear is the best way to get influenced by something.'

'We realise that keeping an open ear is the best way to get influenced by something'
– William Gao

They started out basic

In the early days of the band, William and Olivia were pretty lo-fi when it came to making music, recording their tunes on GarageBand. Since then they've moved into a studio, which has given the pair more freedom to experiment.

The story behind *Remember When*

Their recent single is another gentle ballad with lots of heart, so it's not surprising to hear that the song means a lot to William. 'I was really down about the pandemic and lockdown and I didn't realise how much I missed school, my friends and just being able to chat with people. And that made me think about the passage of time.'

Mother's always right

Growing up in Croydon, their parents consistently encouraged them to 'absorb culture' wherever possible. Their British dad had briefly worked as an actor and their Chinese mum, who moved to the UK in her twenties, gently pushed them to stick with their music lessons, which they grudgingly did, telling them: 'You're gonna like this in the future, trust me.' But as young kids, the constant practising took its toll. Olivia found learning the violin repetitive, while William felt restricted by his piano lessons. It was when he turned '12 or 13' that 'something clicked' and he was able to enjoy the process more. 'When you learn the notes and the techniques, there's this whole other world where you get to make it up for yourself,' he says. 'That was the start of me discovering songwriting.'

How Wasia Project began

After writing songs together for years and playing them to friends, they both knew this musical path was for them as 'it fed a lot of creative hunger' in both of them. 'It was all about stepping back and looking at something you've created, then picking at it to improve your skills,' Olivia recalls.

The fanbase is growing

The first ever gig they performed was at The Beehive pub in Bromley-by-Bow in 2021 where they played to around 30 people – 'all of them friends'. A year later, they faced a larger crowd at The Fiddler in Kilburn and saw a different audience piling in. 'It was just after the release of our EP and the place was packed with people singing our music,' Olivia recalls. 'It was the first gig where we didn't know the majority of people personally. It really felt like a community for our music was building.' In July 2023, they performed at Latitude Festival and walked out to a 'beautiful tent full of people'.

wasiaproject.com

'I'd do anything to be in *Mamma Mia 3*!'

West End and *I Have A Dream* star **Tobias Turley** talks ABBA, dark musicals and swapping sport for the theatre

Fifty years after ABBA triumphed at Eurovision, the melodic Swedish supergroup remain as popular as ever. Attractions like ABBA Voyage and *Mamma Mia! The Party* continue to pack in the punters, while the insanely successful musical *Mamma Mia!* is preparing to celebrate 25 years in the West End. And to mark the show's anniversary, mega producer Judy Kramer teamed up with ITV to produce *Mamma Mia: I Have A Dream*, a talent show seeking new cast members to play the characters Sophie and Skye (played in the movies by Amanda Seyfried and Dominic Cooper). After eight weeks, Stevie Doc was picked by viewers for the role of Sophie, and the all-rounder Tobias Turley was chosen as Skye. We caught up with him to chat about his glittering future...

Congratulations, you won! What an experience you've had...

It was a new world for me, audition wise – you never really audition for a musical this way but it was the best experience I've had. It was tough at times, it was intense, but I wouldn't change a thing.

Unlike normal auditions, you've got all those experts on site to give you advice helping you along the way...

Exactly. It's like you audition for the show and the TV show itself is a production, and you almost forget that it's also an audition for *Mamma Mia!*.

You all got on so well, was there competitiveness?

I think maybe towards the start there was, but everyone bonded so well. We are

genuinely like a little family so you just wanted to see everyone do well no matter what.

What was the toughest part?

I think the hardest thing was seeing people leave, because everyone wanted it so much and put their heart and soul into it. We knew people had to leave, but it was always hard watching them go. The criticism I welcomed as I know that I'm not perfect, nowhere near, and so getting advice from these judges who are legends within the industry was invaluable.

The judges went wild about many of your performances. How did that make you feel watching it back?

It's the best feeling! We were so focused on performing that we didn't know what they were doing and seeing – how they reacted during the song was really lovely, especially when they reacted so enthusiastically. It was great to watch.

What is Judy Kramer like? She

looks fabulous!

She's a presence. You can just feel when she walks into a room. She has so much passion for *Mamma Mia!*. And although she's been doing *Mamma Mia!* for years, it still seems like her passion and her love for it is unwavering. So she was really great to work with and to hear stories from her about Amanda Seyfried and Cher and all these amazing people. It was quite nerve-racking performing in front of her, but it was always really nice when she approved and said: 'You're doing great.'

The great thing about these shows is that they are a shop window for talent – you don't have to win to become successful. Look at Samantha Barks, who didn't win the *Oliver!* show...

Yes, it was reassuring. Obviously during the process everyone was like: 'We've not come this far to come second.' But whatever happened it's quite nice knowing that although someone may not win and get that contract, there's always hope for the future.

***Mamma Mia!* has impressively been running for 25 years – and now you're part of it...**

Yes, it's amazing, I can't believe it. Not many shows get to that. The show is just magical. It has these amazing songs. It's hard to explain why ABBA are as popular as they are. I don't think science can explain it either! There's just something lasting

'It's hard to explain why ABBA are as popular as they are. I don't think science can explain it either! They have songs for everything'

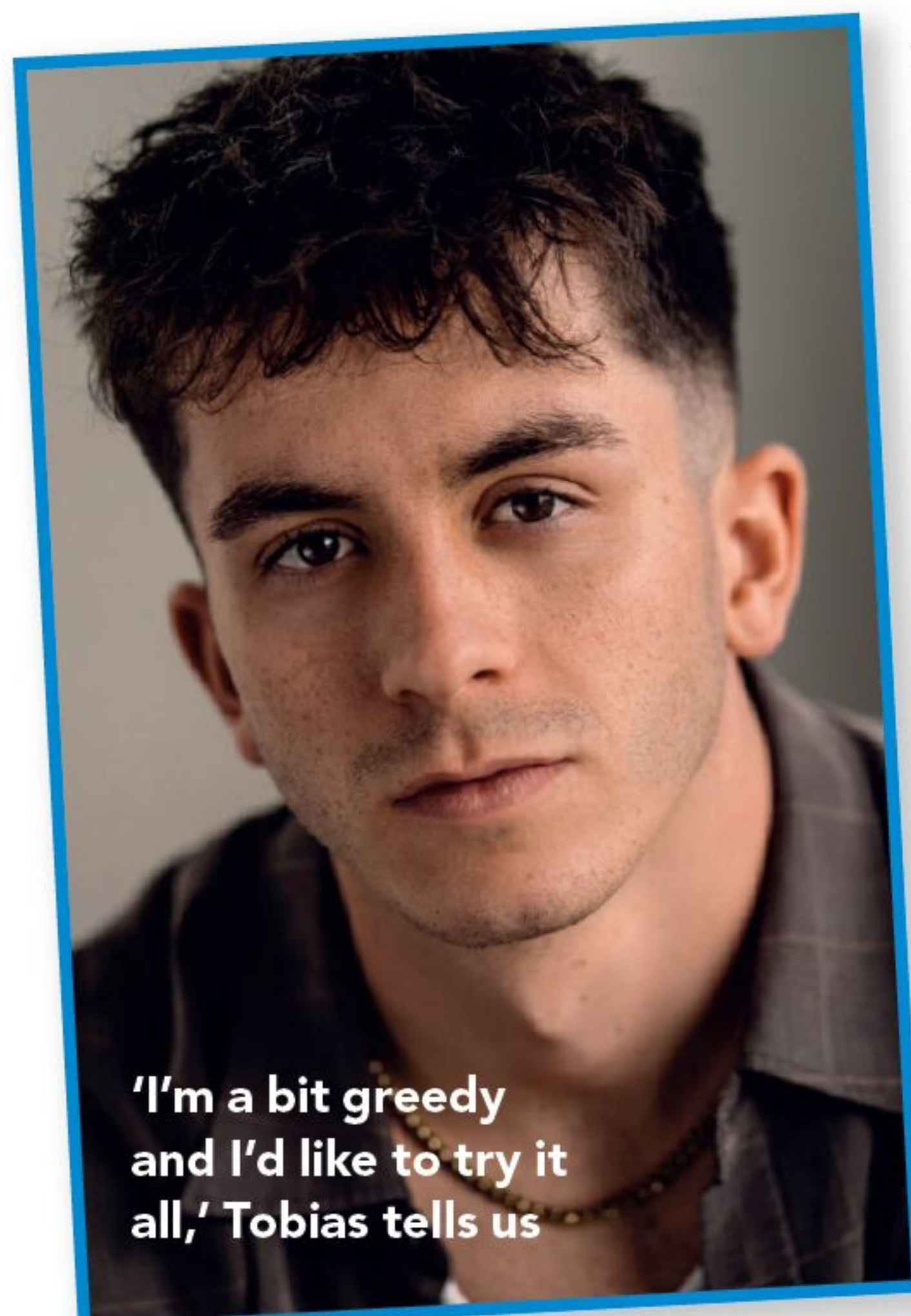
about their songs. Maybe it's just they have songs for everything, for every occasion, for every place, for every person listening. I think they just appeal to the largest kind of market ever.

Judy Kramer says she is planning a *Mamma Mia 3*. Are you hoping she'll bear you in mind for it?

I've been sweet talking Judy as much as I can. I'll do anything to be in it. I can be a young, Dominic Cooper. I'll be whatever she needs me to be. Just find me something in the film!

Back to you... no sooner had you left college and you landed a role in the hugely successful *Heathers*...

After I graduated, I had about three months of doing nothing. And then I went and did a panto over Christmas in Mansfield. And then I got my first proper job touring with Giovanni Pernice as lead male vocalist and dancer as well, so



'I'm a bit greedy and I'd like to try it all,' Tobias tells us





that was great. But then I got *Heathers*, which was my first proper acting role – I played Kurt and I understudied JD as well, which was a dream role for me. So it was a really amazing experience. You know, it's such a great show. The music is brilliant and the characters are quite relatable. So when I graduated from Guildford School of Acting, I loved being able to dive in and find the juicy bits in the character. It was a real pleasure.

Was acting and starring in musicals something you wanted to get into from an early age?

I planned on going into sports. I played handball to a high level and thought that was the route I was going to go down until about 16, when I did a show called *Barnum*. The reception of that was great. It was such a big role and I realised I was quite good at it and decided it was what I wanted to do. I got such a personal thrill from it that I knew I had found where my passion lay.

What was your dream role at the time?

Well, JD was one and I'm very lucky to have managed to tick it off the list. But I have more. I think when I'm a bit older I'd like to try some Shakespeare but I'm a bit young for that. What I'd really like to do is have what I call 'the Charlie Stemp roles', so like Barnaby in *Hello, Dolly!* or like Arthur Kipps in *Half A Sixpence*. I'd love to be able to get the full experience

of doing the beautiful balletic jazz with these amazing songs.

Do you think there are too many musicals based on films?

I actually wrote my uni dissertation on this exact question. I think it's a tough one because a lot of the movies that are being turned into musicals are fan favourites. They're popular movies and have to have good storylines for them to work well as a musical. I think there is

something to them, they have that built-in fanbase already and it does create an excitement for theatregoers, so I think it's a good thing because it's keeping people interested in theatre.

Appearing in shows means you get to work in some lovely theatres – which are your favourites?

I think that's actually one of the best things about the West End, you get to work in some of the most beautiful buildings. I love the Gillian Lynn where I watched *Crazy For You* a couple of months back. That theatre's just beautiful, its seating is gorgeous.

We know what you're doing from the end of January, but what else do you want to do?

I'd love to do a play and delve into some deep characters. And after doing *Mamma Mia: I Have A Dream*, I've got the bug for TV. I'm a bit greedy and I'd like to try it all!

Tobias and Stevie join Mamma Mia! at the Novello Theatre from January 29



Above: 'I think the hardest thing was seeing people leave,' Tobias says of *Mamma Mia: I Have A Dream* (top)

new year



Happy New Year!

Say goodbye to 2023 and welcome 2024 in style at some of the capital's most fabulous New Year's Eve celebrations



London New Year's Eve fireworks

For the past 15 years or so, London has welcomed in each New Year with a firework display that is second to none. The Mayor of London has promised this year's show will be the best in years. You could cosy up at home to watch the display on television, but that's not fun, is it? So why not brave the cold and perhaps make new friends by heading down to the river to watch the show live. Be warned, it is ticket-only event. However, if you miss out on tickets – as they tend to get snapped up pretty smartish – there are plenty of places in London where you can nab a great view.

Cannon Street

If you can wrap up warm to face the cold, you can sit just outside of the ticketing zone, between St Paul's Cathedral, Mansion House and Bank, where you will have a great view of the London New Year's Eve fireworks. Get there early, as it's going to be very busy.

Nearest tube(s): Cannon Street, St Paul's, Bank

Central London Bridges

Head to Victoria Embankment, Waterloo Bridge or Westminster Bridge, as they are great spots to see the extravaganza take place. Get to Westminster Bridge early as it is closed at 8pm. Also try the Millennium Bridge or Southwark Bridge, but if you don't fancy being crushed in the crowds, head a little further along the river to Vauxhall Bridge or Lambeth Bridge.

Nearest tubes: Waterloo, Westminster, Southwark, Vauxhall

Primrose Hill

It's nowhere near the river, but if you perch at the top of the hill you can see out across London. And to see the fireworks shoot into the sky from such a distance will be nothing short of magical.

Official tickets: www.london.gov.uk/events/london-new-years-eve-2023

Celebrate NYE while seeing the city

■ Join the rooftop party at Madison London, where you'll have a fabulous view of St Paul's Cathedral and the fireworks. www.madisonlondon.net

■ Head to the tenth floor of The Standard Hotel for a night at Decimo's NYE party, where you can shake your groove thang to your heart's content. www.decimo.london

■ Savour a five-course tasting menu at the Sea Containers hotel restaurant as you look out across the sparkly London skyline. Later, why not head up to the rooftop at 12th Knot for the New Year's Eve countdown. www.seacontainerslondon.com

■ Enjoy some NYE festivities aboard on the River Thames. Hop on the Silver Sturgeon and cruise through London, checking out the stunning views of London's historic landmarks. www.silverfleet.co.uk/the-fleet/silver-sturgeon/

Royal Festival Hall

To get a good view of the fireworks by the Thames, what better place than the 11th annual New Year's Eve party at Royal Festival Hall with themed pop-up nightclubs, live orchestras, DJs and photo-booths.

Where: Royal Festival Hall, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX

New Year's Eve At Somerset House With Moët & Chandon

If you want start 2024 feeling super swanky, then head to Somerset House for their party in collaboration with Moët & Chandon.

Where: Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA

Dancing on ice – London's best rinks!

When winter rolls in and the fairy lights begin to twinkle, who doesn't fancy gracefully gliding across the ice. Yet again, London plays host to a variety of ice attractions for those who can skate as well as Torvill and Dean – and even those who can inch their way around a rink with the help of a penguin!

Underbelly's Skate West End

This year Hanover Square plays host to an oval shaped rink that is just a stone's throw from Oxford Street and Regent Street. Nestled beneath the trees in the square is a festive wonderland fit for the whole family, while raising money for Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity. A percentage of the money from every ticket sold goes to the charity, with a target donation of at least £55,000 throughout the season.

skatewestend.com

When: Until Jan 1

Rink Canary Wharf

If you hop on the Jubilee line and head south, the Rink Canary Wharf is one of the longest of the London rinks, where skaters can whizz around in the shadow of Canary Wharf's futuristic glass and metal skyscrapers. Okay, it might not be the most festive of settings, but it's still just as magical.

icerinkcanarywharf.co.uk

When: Until Feb 24

Glide at Battersea Power Station

Once upon a time the power station loomed over the Thames, derelict and unloved – then some clever folks decided to redevelop it and transformed it into one of London's most exciting areas, complete with shops, restaurants, hotels and offices. For the second year it hosts a riverside ice rink where you can skate around its impressive 30ft Christmas tree with the historic power station on one side of you and the glistening Thames on the other. For those who fancy all the fun of the festive season, there are a handful of fairground rides near the ice.

When: Until Jan 7

glidebatterseapowerstation.co.uk



Skylight at Tobacco Dock in Wapping

If you want to feel like you're dancing among the stars, then head to Tobacco Dock where you can skate to your heart's content on what is supposed to be Europe's only rooftop rink. The views of the London cityscape are quite spectacular and unique. But there's more – those not inclined to risk their lives (or at least their dignity) on ice can enjoy an igloo village and glowing Christmas trees, and one level down, there's a mountain retreat-themed après ski bar serving mulled wine, festive cocktails and a new raclette menu.

www.skylightbars.com/tobacco-dock

Skate at Somerset House

Make your way along the Strand and walk through a nondescript entrance and you will step into the impressive Fountain Court at the heart of the lavish Somerset House. This is one of the most popular rinks in London, not least because of its decadent surroundings. But it's more than just a chance to

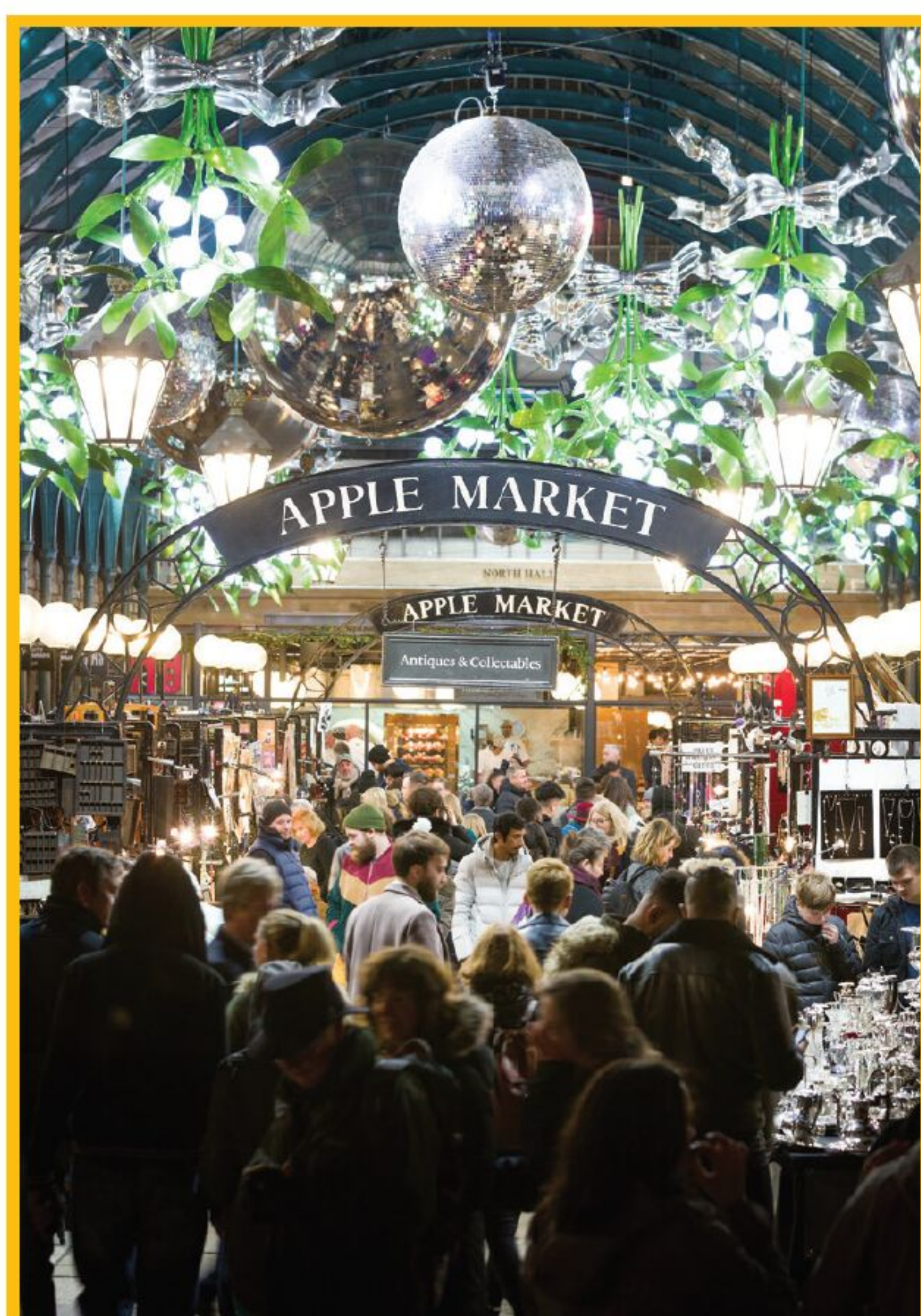
skate across the ice – there are bars and DJs and all manner of festive fun. If you want to learn to skate there are some National Ice Skate Association instructors on hand. This year there's also a new pop-up called Shelter Boutique, where visitors can buy vintage, designer and high-street clothing. There is also chef Jimmy Garcia's pop-up chalet-themed restaurant, Chalet Suisse, which boasts various Alps-inspired dishes on its menu.

When: Until Jan 14

Hyde Park Winter Wonderland.

If you can bear to be slap bang amid festive crowds, then Winter Wonderland has lots to offer, including bars, snackeries, a Victorian bandstand and fair rides. But there is also an ice rink which is said to be the largest open-air one in the UK. If you can shut out the noise and revelry from the noisy fairground, you may have a fabulous time gliding across the ice as if you were in a magical dream.

When: Until January 1



Christmas markets

There's nothing more festive than mooching around a Christmas market, inhaling sweet smells of cinnamon and mulled wine. And across central London you have many to choose from.

At **Hyde Park Winter Wonderland** there's a variety of stalls selling food and drinks plus gifts and homemade decorations. However, to access this you will need to purchase a ticket to enter. Across town, the **Southbank Centre Winter Market** is festooned with colourful lights and stalls selling tasty tucker and stocking fillers. Not only that, you also get a lovely view of the river which winds out of view.

Stroll across the bridge to Charing Cross and you will find markets in **Trafalgar Square**, **Covent Garden** and **Leicester Square** – there are some similarities but also big differences, so it's definitely worth a mooch through all of them.



Christmas at the Actors' Church, Covent Garden

If you stroll through the Piazza of Covent Garden you will notice the gorgeous Actors' Church, which faces the market building. This Christmas period it plays host to a series of magical events.

There's already been A Musical Theatre Christmas, featuring a host of musical talent in a fabulous festive fundraiser; the annual Theatre Chaplaincy UK service, in which Sheila Hancock was among the industry pros sharing seasonal readings; and an uplifting family concert of soul and gospel music. Here is some of what's still to come...

December 15 and December 22: Baby Broadway is an interactive performance for all ages incorporating songs from hit shows like *ELF The Musical*, *White Christmas*, *The Snowman*, *Frozen* and many more.

December 15: Enjoy *Christmas With Vasari: Music On Christmas Morning*, with traditional carols for choir and audience alike, as well as some newer pieces set to delight, all for £25!

December 17: At 3pm the Grove Singers – resplendent in Elizabethan garb – for *Nine Lessons And Carols*, as they belt out some tunes, and stage actors and entertainers give readings from The

Bible.

December 17: *Christmas With The Stars*, an all-star charity concert in aid of Children with Cancer UK – £33 a ticket, and worth every penny.

December 18: For £15, take part in the great Christmas Sing-Along.

December 19: The Food Chain – a charity that ensures people with HIV can get the nutrition they need to lead healthy lives – is hosting a free carol service from 7pm.

December 22: HOT's Piano Trio, made up of students from the prestigious Guildhall School Of Music and Drama, present an eclectic mix of enchanting Christmas melodies.



December 23: Harmony's Music Club present an enchanting candlelit Christmas concert. Tickets are £14 (standard) or £40 for a family of four. actorschurch.org/christmas-actors-church

Family shows for Christmas



Peter Pan

You know it's Christmas when the Palladium plays host to the annual star-studded panto. This year, we have a hysterical and big budget production of *Peter Pan*. Starring Jennifer Saunders as Captain Hook and Julian Clary as seaman Smee, the cast includes all your Palladium panto favourites, including Paul Zerdin, Nigel Havers, Gary Wilmot, Louis Gaunt and Rob Madge. Frances Mayli McCann, who appeared in the hit show *Bonnie & Clyde*, makes her Palladium panto debut. Expect big sets, bigger performances, a few saucy jokes and a gay old time.

When: Until January 14

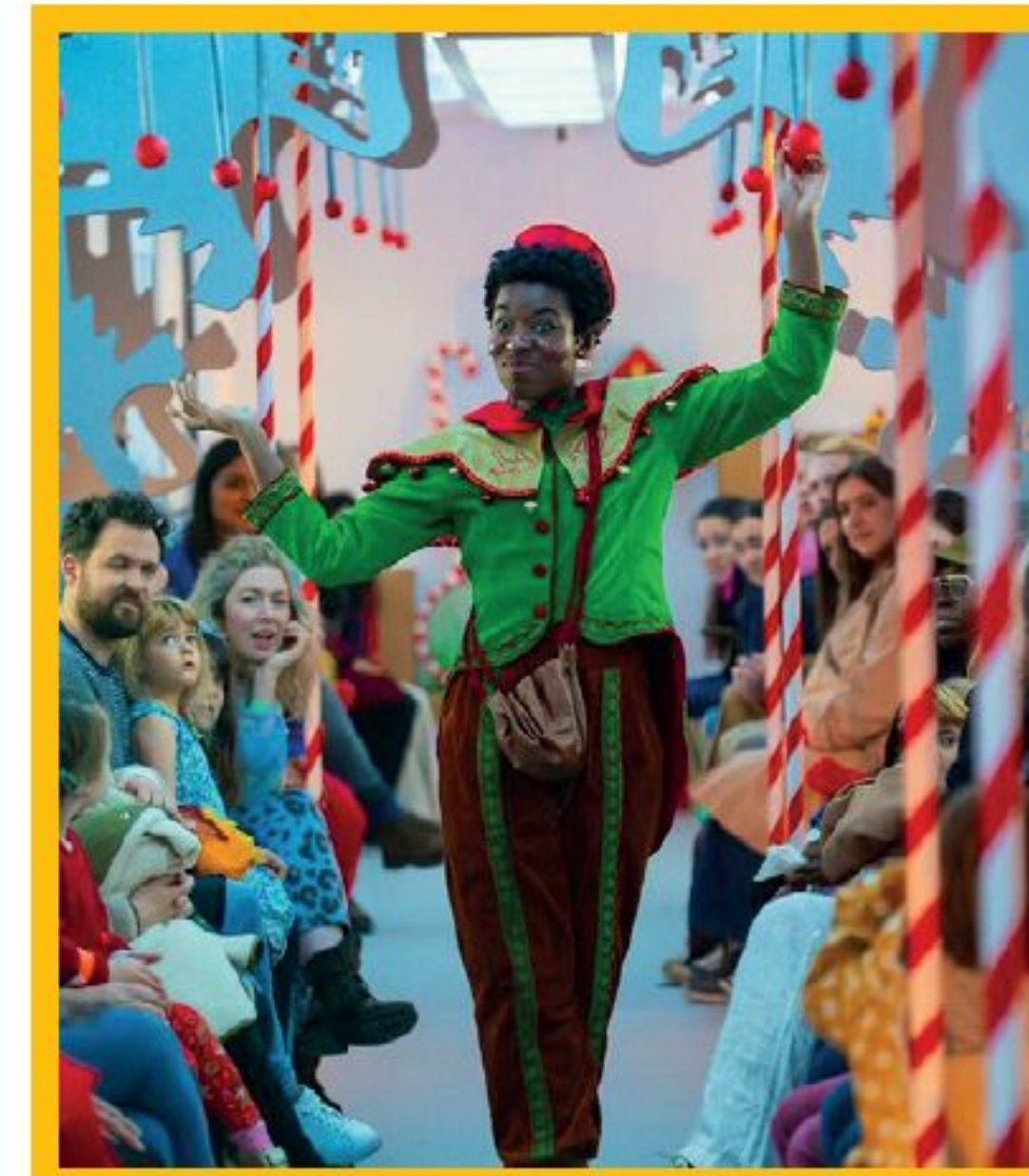


The House With Chicken Legs

Kooky theatre group Les Enfants Terribles and HOME Manchester premiere their adaptation of Sophie Anderson's book, inspired by the myth of Baba Yaga, about a house that won't stand still.

Where: South Bank

When: Until December 30



Wishmas: A Fantastical Christmas Adventure

Audiences are invited to step into the Old Bauble Factory underneath Waterloo where they enter a magical world where robins arrive with the world's wishes, ready for processing by Santa and his crew of wishkeepers.

Where: Old Bauble Factory, Waterloo

When: Until January 7



A Christmas Carol

Scrooge is back – for the seventh time – at the Old Vic, in a production which has become something of a Christmas staple. This time he's played by Christopher Eccleston in Jack Thorne's production.

Where: The Old Vic

When: Until January 6



Stick Man

When Stick Man and his other half and children are hounded by a dog on the hunt for a stick, their lives are thrown into turmoil in this puppet-led retelling of the Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler classic.

Where: Leicester Square Theatre, Leicester Square

When: Until January 2



The Gruffalo's Child

Julia Donaldson has made a generation of children fall in love with reading. This award-winning musical sequel to *The Gruffalo* is packed with inventive storytelling, energy and furry jumpsuits and will keep young children glued to the stage.

Where: Garrick Theatre

When: Until January 7



The Witches

There have already been two successful big screen versions of Roald Dahl's wicked novel about a boy who stumbles across a coven where witches want to transform children into mice. Now comes a musical that will please adults as well as kids.

Where: National Theatre

When: Until January 27

EXHIBITIONS + ATTRACTIONS + THEATRE + MORE...

It's a theatrical Word Hunt

There are so many shows to check out over the next year –
have fun searching out some essential shows and tick
them off when you go and see them!



Angels Of The
North

Cruel Intentions
Hello Dolly!

Burlesque

Plaza Suite

Bronco Billy

The Hunger
Games

The Little Big
Things

The Hills of
California

Just For One Day

Mean Girls

An Enemy Of
The People

The Unfriend

The Time
Traveller's Wife

Sister Act

Too Wong Foo

Police Cops

An Officer And
A Gentleman

Back To
The Future

Macbeth

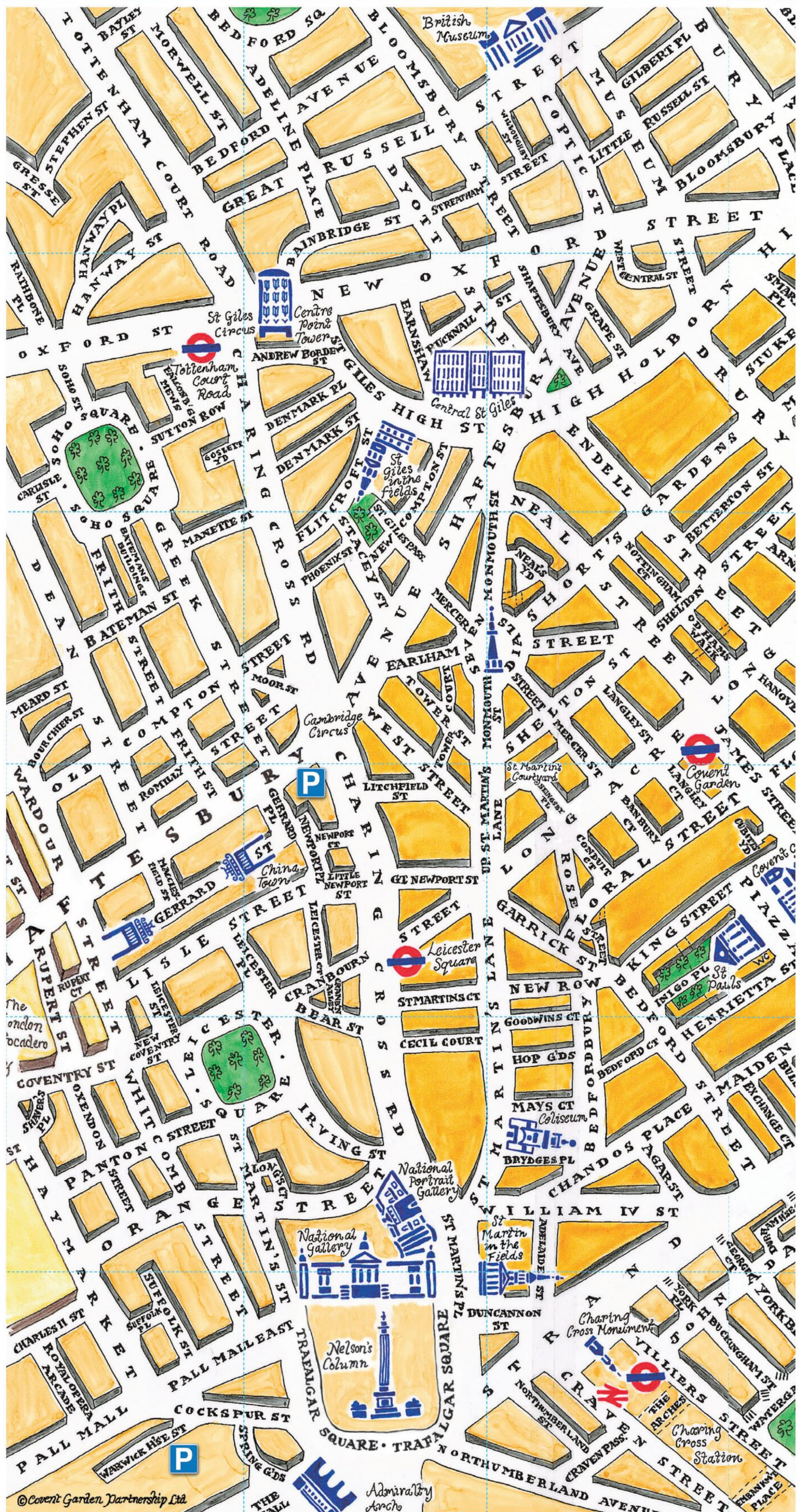
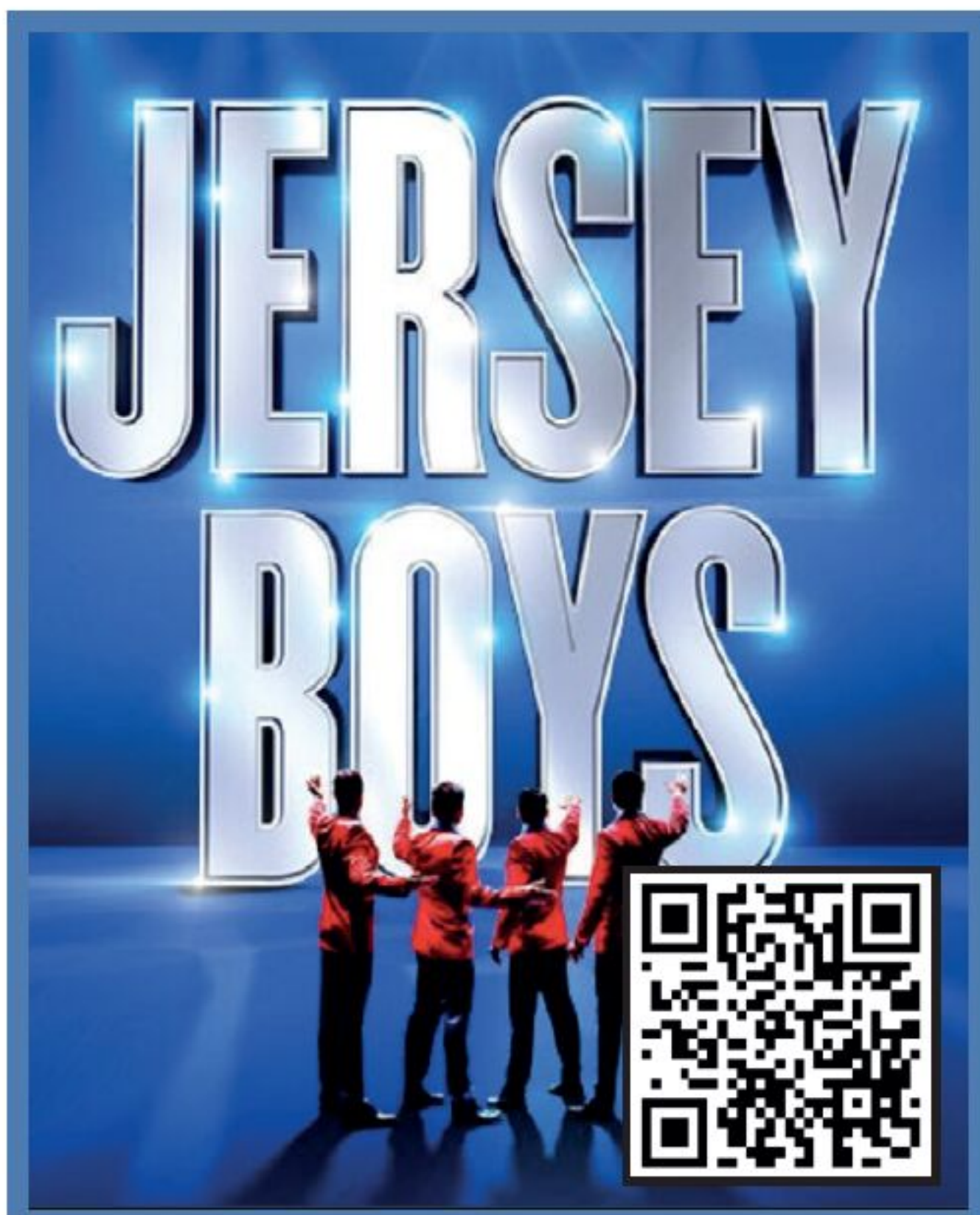
The Picture of
Dorian Gray

Long Day's
Journey Into Night

The Devil Wears
Prada

Clueless

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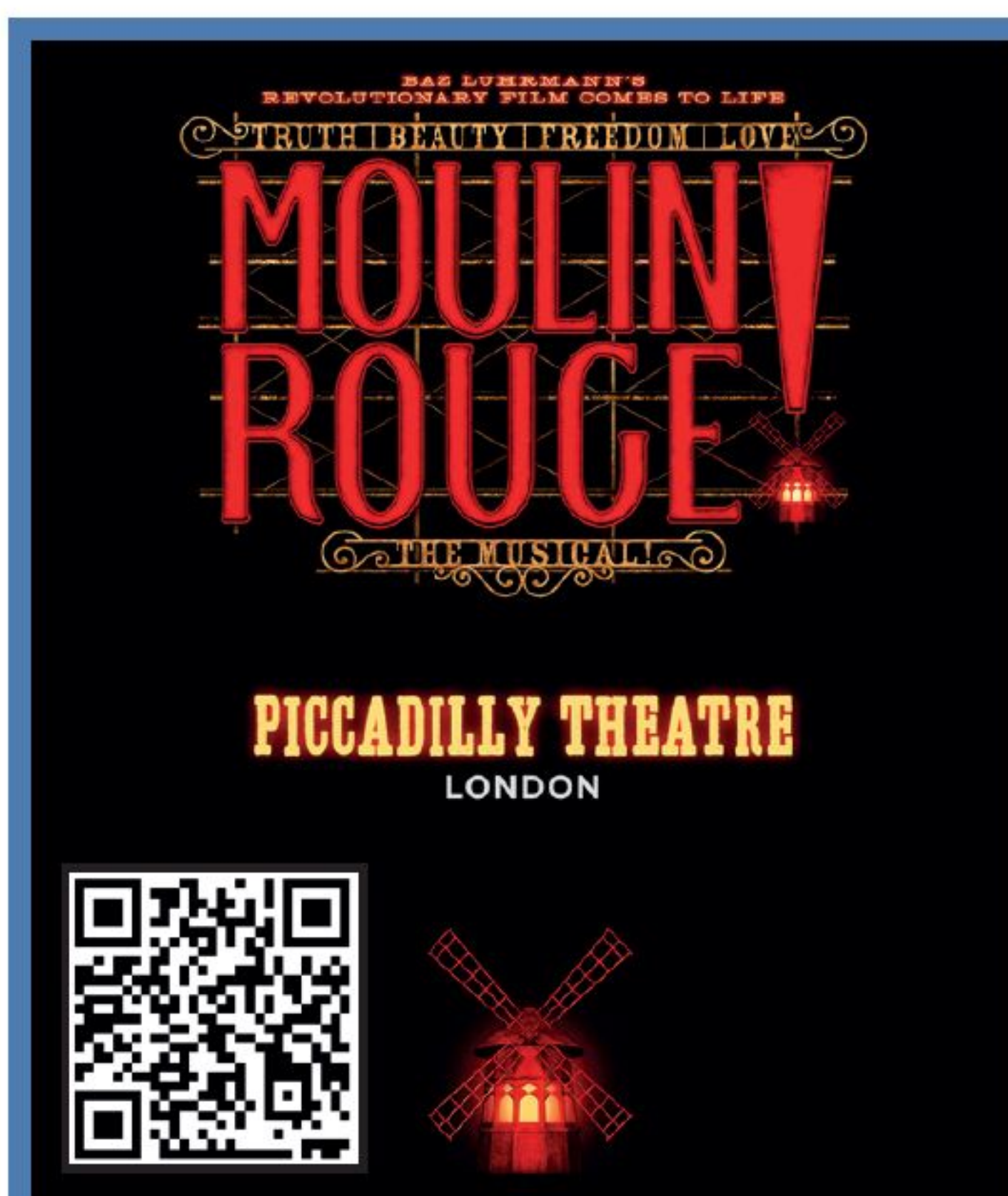
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Curtain up

Your handy guide to what's on stage

Back To The Future

Fantastic musical based on the '80s movie classic.
Where: Adelphi, Strand, WC2R 0NS **Map Ref:** E5

Book Of Mormon

Outrageous musical comedy about the madcap adventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries.
Where: Prince of Wales, Coventry Street, W1D 6AS **Map Ref:** B5

Cabaret

Willkommen! And bienvenue! Welcome! Take your seat at the Kit Kat Club for this immersive version of the musical legend. Seven Olivier Awards really can't be wrong.
Where: Playhouse, Northumberland Ave, WC2N 5DE **Map Ref:** D6

Choir Of Man

Is it a concert? Is it a party? Who knows – you'll be having too much fun to care!
Where: Arts Theatre, 6-7 Great Newport Street, WC2H 7JB **Map Ref:** C2

A Christmas Carol

Christopher Eccleston stars as Ebenezer Scrooge in the fabulously festive Dickens classic. Until January 6
Where: Old Vic, 103 The Cut, SE1 8NB

Dear England

Joseph Fiennes stars as England manager Gareth Southgate in this smash hit production, following its sold out run at the National Theatre. Until January 13.
Where: Prince Edward, 28 Old Compton St, W1D 4HS

ELF The Musical

Enjoy a riotous evening in the company of Buddy, who leaves the North Pole to head to Manhattan. Until January 6.
Where: Dominion, Tottenham Ct Rd, W1T 7AQ **Map Ref:** C2

The Enfield Haunting

Catherine Tate and David Threlfall star in this spooky new play by Paul Unwin,

based on the disturbing true story.
Where: Ambassadors, West St, WC2H 9ND

Frozen

Head to the kingdom of Arendelle and get swept up in the magic, as the Disney blockbuster takes to the stage.
Where: Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Catherine Street, WC2B 5JF **Map Ref:** F3

Guys & Dolls

Daniel Mays stars as Nathan Detroit in this musical classic.
Where: Bridge Theatre, 3 Potters Fields Park, SE1 2SG



Hamilton

Award-winning musical about the life and times of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton.
Where: Victoria Palace, Victoria Street, SW1E 5EA

Hamnet

This Royal Shakespeare Company production is based on Maggie O'Farrell's bestselling novel about the death of William Shakespeare's beloved 11-year-old son Hamnet.
Where: Garrick, Charing Cross Road, WC2H 0HH **Map Ref:** C5

Harry Potter And The Cursed Child

Catch up with Harry and his family years after his spell at Hogwarts.
Where: Palace, Shaftesbury Avenue, W1V 8AY **Map Ref:** C3

Jersey Boys

Jukebox show about Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons packed with hit songs. Until January 4.

Where: Trafalgar, Whitehall SW1A 2DY **Map Ref:** C6

The King And I

Call The Midwife actress Helen George joins Broadway star Darren Lee in the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic, following a sold out UK tour. From January 20.
Where: Dominion, Tottenham Ct Rd, W1T 7AQ **Map Ref:** C2

King Lear

Kenneth Branagh directs and plays the title role in the Shakespeare classic. Until December 9.
Where: Wyndham's, Charing Cross Road, WC2H 0DA **Map Ref:** C4

Les Misérables

A stone cold classic – an epic story packed with epic songs.
Where: Sondheim, Shaftesbury Avenue W1D 6BA **Map Ref:** B4

The Lion King

Breathtaking musical featuring songs by Sir Elton John.
Where: Lyceum, Wellington Street, WC2E 7RQ **Map Ref:** E4

The Little Big Things

This new musical is based on the autobiography of budding sports star Henry Fraser, whose life was changed forever as the result of a diving accident.
Where: @sohoplace, 4 Soho Place, Charing Cross Road, W1D 3BG

Mamma Mia!

Classic ABBA musical that just runs and runs.
Where: Novello, Aldwych, WC2B 4LD **Map Ref:** F3

Matilda: The Musical

Hugely popular musical, written by Tim Minchin, which is based on the hit 1996 film.
Where: Cambridge, Earlham Street, WC2H 9HU **Map Ref:** D3

Moulin Rouge! The Musical

Already a smash on Broadway, this stage

version of the Baz Luhrmann musical is everything you might expect... and more.
Where: Piccadilly, Denman Street W1D 7DY **Map Ref:** A4

The Mousetrap

The murder mystery which has kept audiences guessing for 70 years and shows no sign of stopping any time soon.
Where: St Martin's, West Street WC2H 0DP **Map Ref:** C3

Mrs Doubtfire

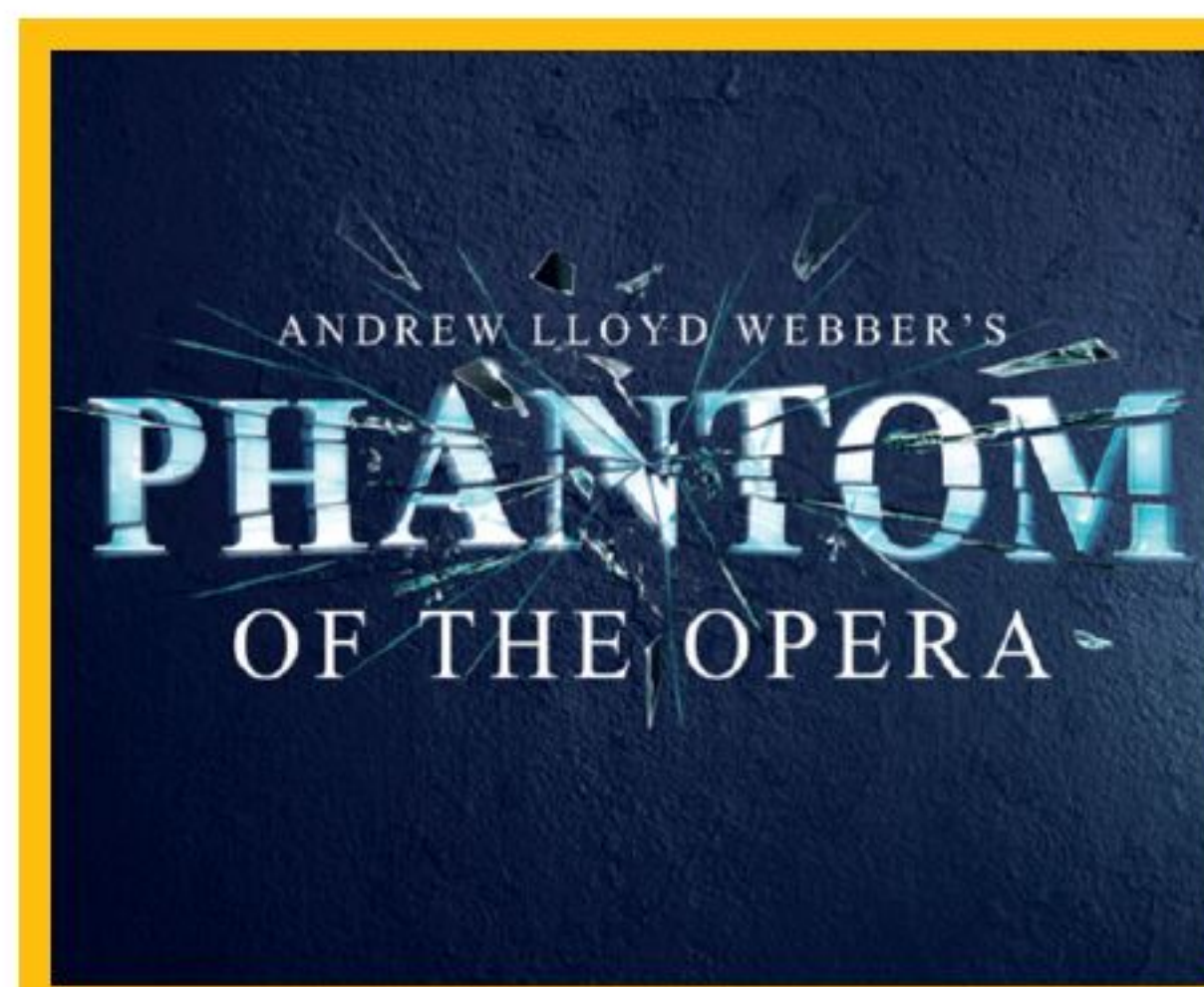
After losing custody of his children, out-of-work actor Daniel takes on the role of a lifetime to win them back.
Where: Shaftesbury, Shaftesbury Avenue WC2H 8DP. **Map Ref:** D2

The Motive And The Cue

Sam Mendes directs this production, based on the making of Richard Burton and John Gielgud's Hamlet on Broadway, for a strictly limited 15-week run. From December 9.
Where: Noel Coward, St Martin's Lane, WC2N 4AU **Map Ref:** C4

Operation Mincemeat

A hilarious show about one of World War Two's most unbelievable stories.



Where: Fortune, Russell Street, WC2B 5HH **Map Ref:** E3

Phantom Of The Opera

Andrew Lloyd Webber's legendary musical of the classic horror tale.
Where: His Majesty's, Haymarket, SW1Y 4QL **Map Ref:** B6

The Play That Goes Wrong

Hilarious slapstick romp about a drama society.
Where: Duchess, Catherine Street, WC2B 5LA

Six

Smash hit musical about the six wives of Henry VIII.
Where: Vaudeville, Strand WC2R 0NH **Map Ref:** E5

Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends

Bernadette Peters and Lea Salonga celebrate the life and work of the late, great Stephen Sondheim. Until January 6.
Where: Gielgud, Shaftesbury Avenue, W1D 6AR **Map Ref:** B4

Sunset Boulevard

Nicole Scherzinger takes on the iconic role of Norma Desmond. Until January 6.
Where: Savoy, Strand WC2R 0ET **Map Ref:** E5

The Time Traveller's Wife

This new musical, with songs from Joss Stone and Dave Stewart, brings Audrey Niffenegger's bestselling novel to life.
Where: Apollo, Shaftesbury Avenue, W1D 7EZ

Tina – The Tina Turner Musical

Musical biopic of the legendary singer.
Where: Aldwych, WC2B 4DF **Map Ref:** F3

Unbelievable

A stunning evening of magic, with jaw-dropping illusions never seen before in the West End. Until January 7.
Where: Criterion, 218-223 Piccadilly, St James's, W1J 9HR. **Map Ref:** A5

The Unfriend

Lee Mack, Frances Barber and Sarah Alexander star in Steven Moffat's comedy about a couple who befriend a woman on holiday... and make the mistake of keeping in touch. From December 16.
Where: Duke of York's, St Martin's Ln, WC2N 4BG

Wicked

Fun romp about Elphaba and Glinda's trip to see the Wizard Of Oz.
Where: Apollo Victoria, Wilton Road, SW1V 1LL

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The *Popstars: The Rivals* band celebrate 21 years and honour Sarah Harding's memory

GIRLS ALOUD REUNITE

Girls Aloud have said their upcoming live shows in 2024 will never be quite the same, having lost their bandmate Sarah Harding to cancer. The feisty pop sensation lost her battle with breast cancer in 2022 at a time when she and the girls were thinking about celebrating the 20th anniversary of winning *Popstars: The Rivals*, which propelled them to stardom. Following her death, the remaining girls – Nicola Roberts, Cheryl, Kimberley Walsh and Nadine Coyle – withdrew from public life to grieve the loss of their friend, and put all thoughts of a reunion in 2023 to the back of their minds. 'We were in no emotional shape to even contemplate celebrating it at the time,' Nicola told *Vogue* magazine recently. 'Everything went out the window when we learnt about her diagnosis. We just needed to be there for her and support her as much as we could.'

However, following the unprecedented outpouring of emotion and support from the group's fans, the girls began to think about reuniting – not just to celebrate the 21st anniversary of winning *Popstars: The Rivals*, but to pay tribute to their much missed friend Sarah which, Cheryl says, she would have encouraged. 'She turned to me once and said: "You know when I'm not here, you girls should do something." But when you're face to face with someone that's dying... We just thought some miracle was going to occur. We all thought we might be able to do something together.'

And so the girls have decided to take to the road once again to celebrate what they achieved during their hugely successful career and to give fans the chance to join them to pay tribute to Sarah.

'I see it as a celebration of a milestone,' Cheryl says. 'And listen: it's gonna be unreal.'

And it's gonna be the nostalgia of your life.' Adds Kimberley: 'I think we channelled our grief into all the fundraising we did for The Sarah Harding Breast Cancer Appeal and that helped us a lot. And as tough as it will





‘I see it as a celebration of a milestone... it’s gonna be unreal. And it’s gonna be the nostalgia of your life’
– Cheryl

be, we want to give Sarah her moment on this tour. We need it. The fans need it. She needs it.’

Some fans were hoping the group were planning to record some new music to coincide with the tour but, as Cheryl explains, the girls decided this was for the best (and not just because they had learned the lesson from the Spice Girls’ less-than-stellar reunion song *Headlines*).

‘We couldn’t, because Sarah wouldn’t be included in that newness. This is about celebrating the 20 years we’ve all had. So the tour has got to be inclusive of Sarah because she’s such a massive part of our make-up. It will never feel like the old Girls Aloud again but we’ve reached a point

where we feel ready to celebrate all of it. Sarah included.’ She adds: ‘We’re going to make a new type of sparkle with her in it.’

While the girls have lost a dear friend, they are also so wary that the group’s fanbase also lost someone they love deeply. ‘Fans have lost Sarah as well,’ Nicola says. ‘It’s going to be strange for them to see us as a four, it’s going to be strange for us to be a four, but we’ve got to take it one day at a time. We’re going to make it magic for her.’

www.girlsaloud.com

GIRLS ALOUD’S ESSENTIAL SONGS

Girl bands come and go, but few have ever been as inventive, cool and popular as Girls Aloud. They didn’t just release pop songs, they unleashed works of pop art – songs that sounded avant garde, a collision of genres, yet still packing a pop punch. Over the course of their career they released five albums, and enjoyed a slew of top ten hits.

For those who need a refresher or are new to the majesty of their back catalogue, let us present you with the ten songs you simply must listen to!

Sound Of The Underground – Their debut single smashed their Popstars rivals One True Voice in the race to the Christmas number one. Sounding unlike anything from a reality show at the time, this was pop with a cool drum and bass backing track.

Call The Shots – This superior moodfest was a classic pop ballad which stood head and shoulders over the weepy covers like *Stand By You* and *See The Day*.

Wake Me Up – A feisty, pop punk call to arms that will get you on your feet.

Graffiti My Soul – Another aggressive but catchy slice of pop, with country twangs and sassy vocals.

Something Kinda Oooh – This pop bullet is everything: noisy, euphoric, insane and super addictive.

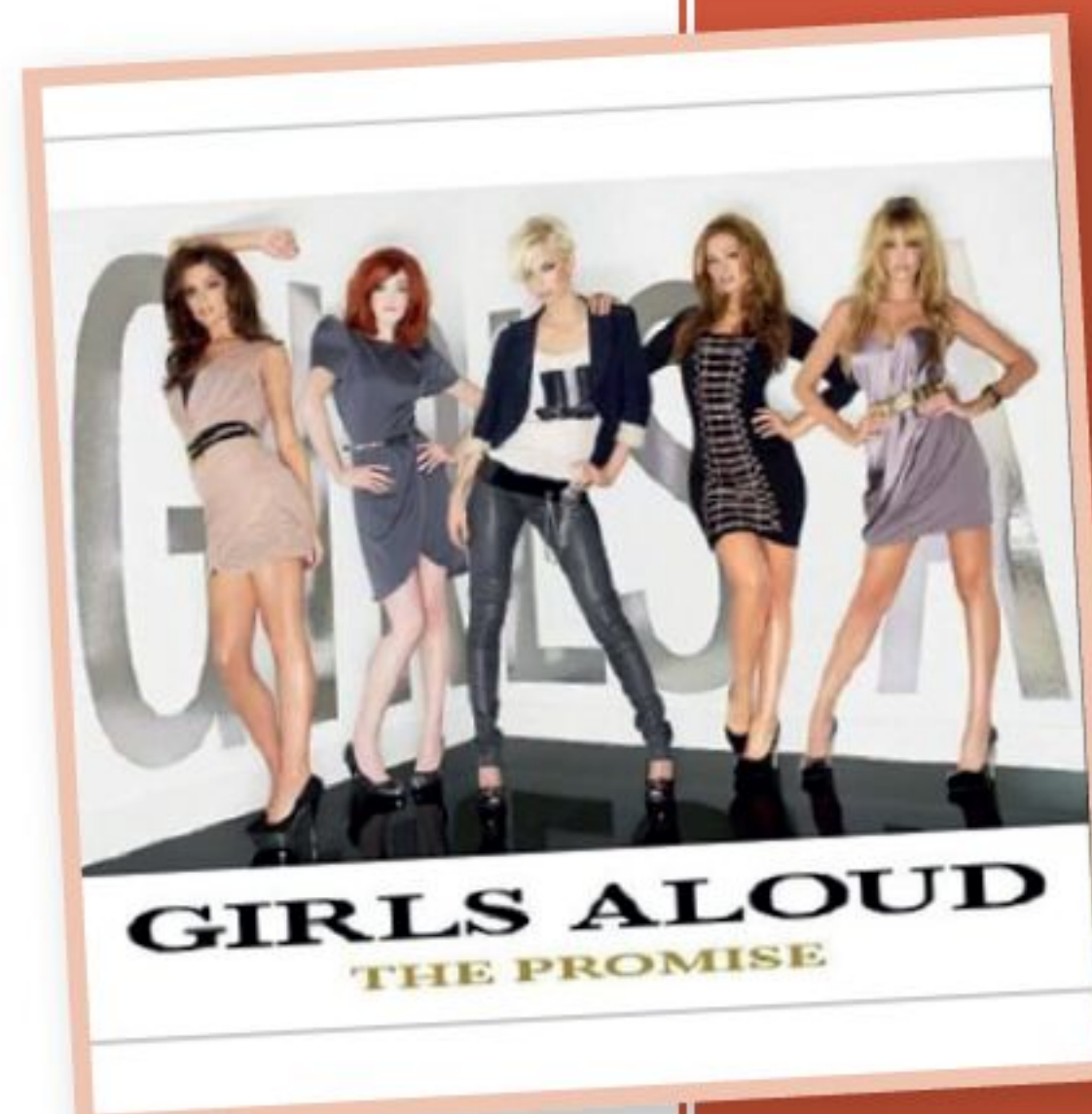
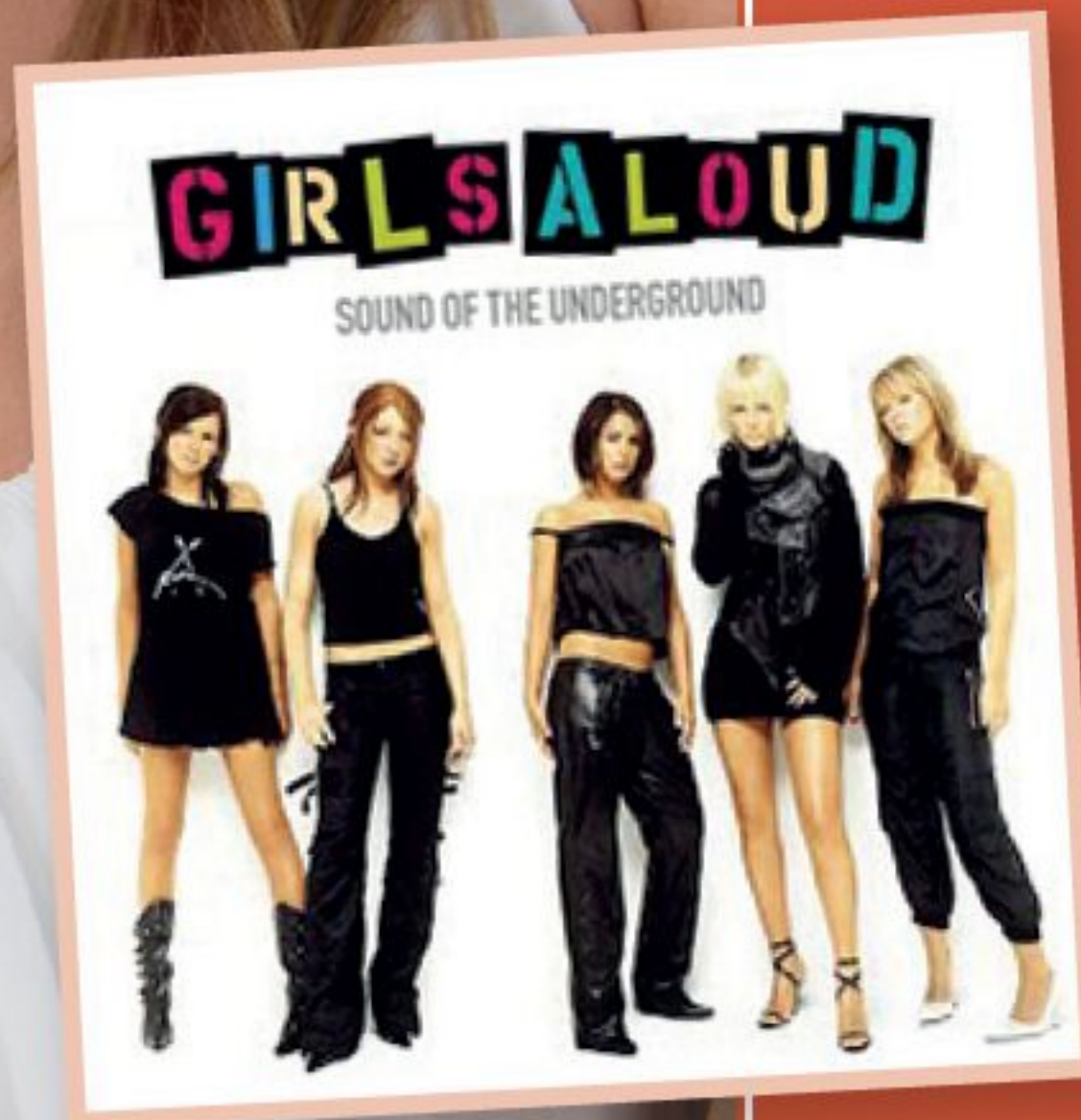
Girl Overboard – This featured on the *Tangled Up* album and should have been a single – a camp arms-in-the air triumph.

Crazy Fool – A B-side that was super moody but packed a killer punch. Co-written by Cheryl, it is a little known classic that should have been a single.

Something New – released to mark their tenth anniversary, this tune kicks butt with its punchy production and stropky vocals. Genius.

The Promise – An iconic lead single from the *Out Of Control* album which was accompanied by a sassy music clip in which the girls were transformed into ‘60s sirens.

The Show – This jaggedly produced little pop gem is so catchy with its staccato vocals and infectious melody that it’s hard to shake off.



theatre

Dancer **Pasha Kovalev** tells Lizzy Price about *Strictly*, fatherhood and his new musical

Dancing under the glitterball of *Strictly Come Dancing* stopped five years ago for Pasha Kovalev but he's been a firm fixture on West End stages since. His focus has switched to choreography and production but his passion for dance still burns and he's made a promise to shake things up.

'I feel that Latin and ballroom is really underrepresented in theatres and I'm willing to help change it,' Pasha, 43, pledges. 'It's a different dance language and it's so exciting. I feel like people are thirsty for it and I'm there to quench their thirst!'

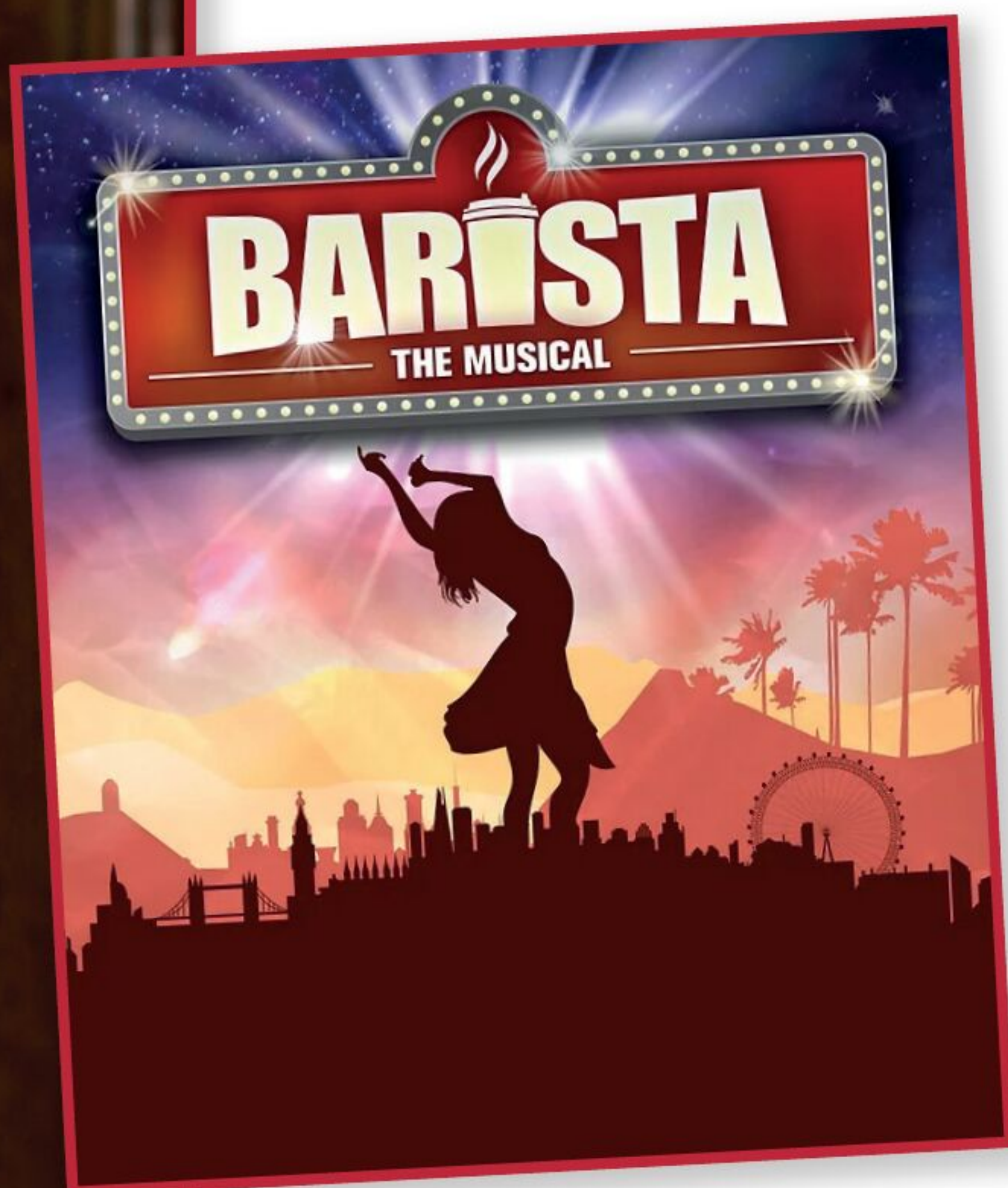
He's using brand new show *Barista The Musical*, opening in 2024, to unleash original music, Latin grooves and a mash-up of cultures, and we're shoulder shimmying at the very thought! During his eight years on *Strictly*, the professional dancer lifted the glitterball trophy with Caroline Flack, still holds the record for most perfect scores with Ashley Roberts and went on to marry his 2013 partner Rachel Riley.

Here, Pasha talks about backstabbing, fatherhood and whether his daughters might follow in his footsteps...

Happy Christmas Pasha! We hear you've choreographed a Christmas film this year...

Yes, filming a Christmas movie in the middle of summer in Bucharest where it was plus 30 degrees and recreating Christmas streets and scenes was really interesting. It's called *Paris Christmas Waltz* and we shot in Bucharest because there's a Little Paris there where the architecture resembles actual Paris. I love any Christmas movies that bring tradition and family and holiday spirit, and this one is about dancing. What can be better – Christmas and dancing?

'I'm
intending
to spice up
the West
End!'



'I feel that Latin and ballroom is really underrepresented in theatres and I'm willing to help change it'

'I would love to see my passion of Latin and ballroom represented more on stage and screen,' says Pasha

What are Christmases like now you have children?

Something you've experienced so many times you now see through the eyes of your children, and seeing how much they love the Christmas tree and everything else is so different. I grew up in the Soviet Union where Christmas wasn't celebrated, but when I moved to America when I was around 20 I was introduced to the whole culture of Christmas – trees, Santa Claus, music and

presents. People being happy and exciting moments. I also learnt the stress that sometimes comes with shopping for family and friends and having to get nice presents for everyone.

La La Land promised a new wave of musicals and dance films but we haven't seen a trend yet...

You don't need to tell me we need more! Dance was popular in classic movies and there was a whole generation of people who knew how to foxtrot, and now with *Strictly* being on screens people are more educated about ballroom and Latin. I would love to see my passion of Latin and ballroom represented more on stage and screen.

So tell us about Barista The Musical...

It's been coming for a long time but now it's full steam ahead. We're in rehearsal period, then September it debuts and then next stop West End. It's about a barista at a coffee shop in London that has connections to coffee produced from Colombia, and seeing those two cultures fuse together is very interesting.

It's a family-friendly show and our goal is for young and old to enjoy it. I'm a Latin dancer and I've been at the centre of Latin culture all my life. As far as I know I don't have any relations to the Latin world besides my love for their dancing and music, but bringing Latin to a musical is something new. In the West End we usually see musicals with musical theatre-style dance. I'm intending to spice it up with Latin hips, moves and lifts and it's going to be very exciting!

Are you encouraging hip-thrusting in the aisles?

Absolutely! The music is original and it's fantastic and has all the authenticity of Colombian music, so it will definitely bring a fiesta and celebration on stage. I'm sure people are going to love it. It's an easily relatable story and I'll be putting my two cents into the mix with my choreography.

Are you tempted to take a part yourself?

I'm taking the choreographer's chair this time. Don't get me wrong, nothing compares to the adrenaline of being on stage and I've done it all my life, but choreographing takes me down a creative route and fine tuning a show alongside writers, directors and composers is really exciting.

Do you miss the adrenaline of being part of a huge TV show like Strictly Come Dancing?

I'm appreciative of what *Strictly* did for dance in general and my career. I loved my time on the show it was just time to move on for me. *Strictly* is so time consuming for professional dancers and once I started raising my own family I had to make a choice, because it's really hard to combine those two things. I wanted to be more present in the lives of my kids and my family. I maintain a great relationship with the programme and keep memories of the whole process.

What are some of the best experiences you'll take away from the show?

For me it was always about setting out and achieving goals with the celebrity and proving to themselves and the audience that you can mould a non-dancer into a smooth operator on stage, and seeing how they thrive in that dance environment.

Shirley Ballas writes in her new book about the backstabbing and win-at-all-costs nature of the professional dance circuit. You seem far too nice for that!

I was always in my own world in a way. For me, dance was all about improving myself. I was never into the politics of the dance world. I know a lot of people who feel the same way I do, and also a lot of people whose absolute goal was to be first no matter what, and regardless of how good they were at dancing! It's fine, it takes all sorts of people to create the flavourful world we live in.

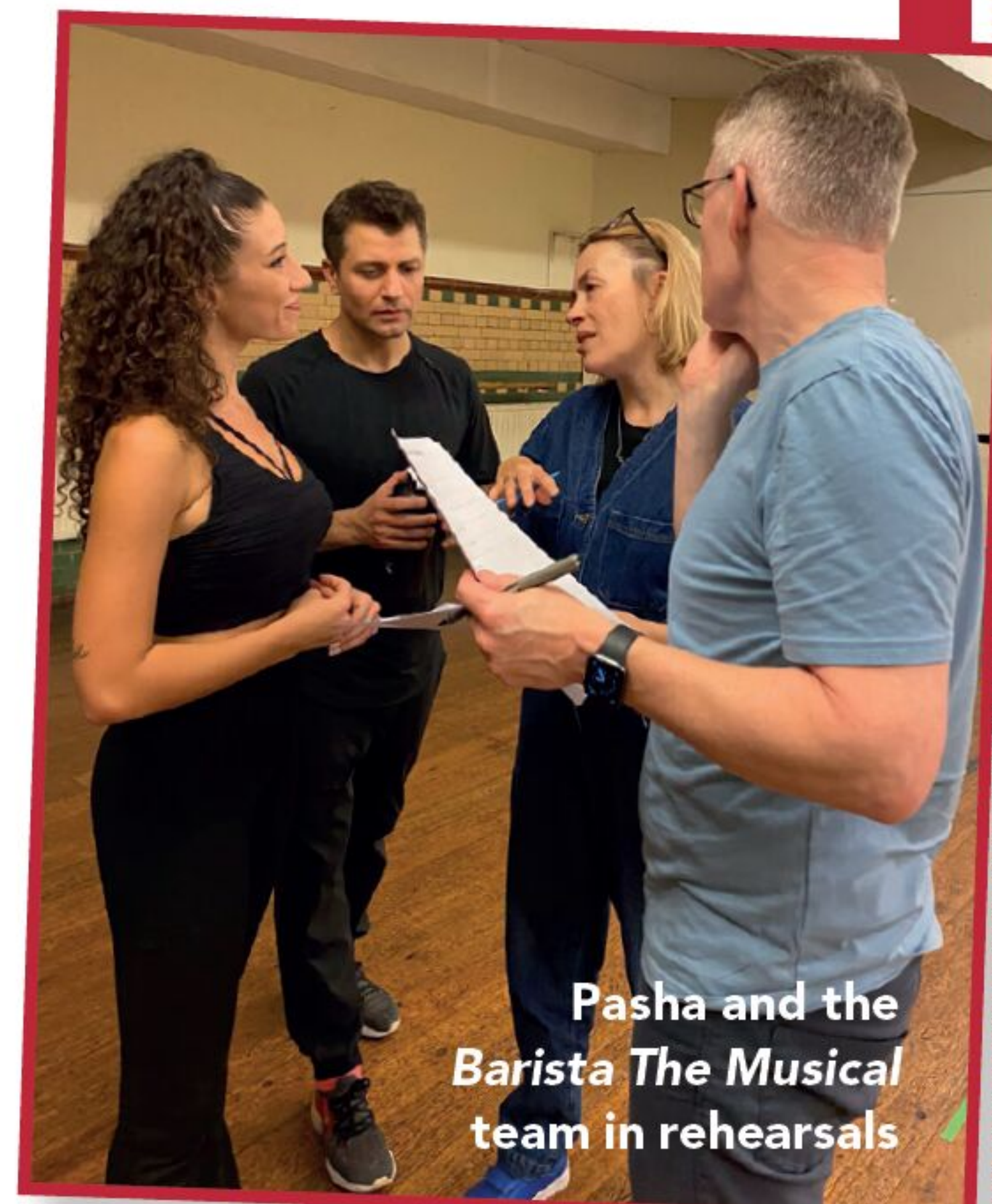
Now you're on tour a lot, what's hardest thing about being away?

The most difficult thing is to miss those little moments in everyday life, especially when kids are at this age. Every single day they learn a new word, a new expression or behavioural pattern. Thankfully, my wife is really good at documenting and taking pictures and videos, but seeing it with your own eyes is more precious.

Would you encourage your daughters into dance?

We'd support them if they want to go there. Both go to dance classes and have fun and are becoming little dancers. Even if they don't choose it as their career, it would be amazing to give them this opportunity to learn about dance and that culture that I've been involved in. But both my wife and I want them to enjoy their lives and be exposed to different things, so they can choose what they like.

Barista The Musical runs from September 12-21 2024, at the Capitol Theatre, Horsham. Tickets available from www.baristathemusical.com



Pasha and the Barista The Musical team in rehearsals

Style
photographer
Leigh Keily
reveals his
fascination with
Elvis Presley
lookalikes

Style magazine editor and celebrity photographer Leigh Keily recently flew to sunny Benidorm to photograph a bunch of Elvis impersonators. The results are featured in a stunning coffee table book. We caught up with Leigh to find out why he was so captivated by them...

Where did the idea for the book come from?

A while ago a friend told me that there was this Elvis fiesta in Benidorm where every year performers come to perform this insane tribute show. I was really amused with the idea that all these people were running around Benidorm dressed as Elvis. But it wasn't so much the Elvis part that drew me in, but more the idea of all these performers dressing up as someone else in one place that I thought was really fascinating. So I thought it might make a good subject for some photos. But it was more than I could ever have expected. It was so unbelievably fascinating and the people I photographed were so lovely and accommodating that we ended up with this big series of images that we exhibited in London in November and then in this book.

Why do you think people still celebrate Elvis – what is it that makes him such a compelling character?

I don't really know how to answer. I mean, it was fascinating to see 150, 200, 300, 400 people filling these like concert halls every night to watch people pretend to be someone else from the '60s and '70s. I don't know why they love him so much. I think that, like a lot of the performers, he was really charismatic. And so these performers – the ones that are successful and are doing the

What did you learn from the various performers?

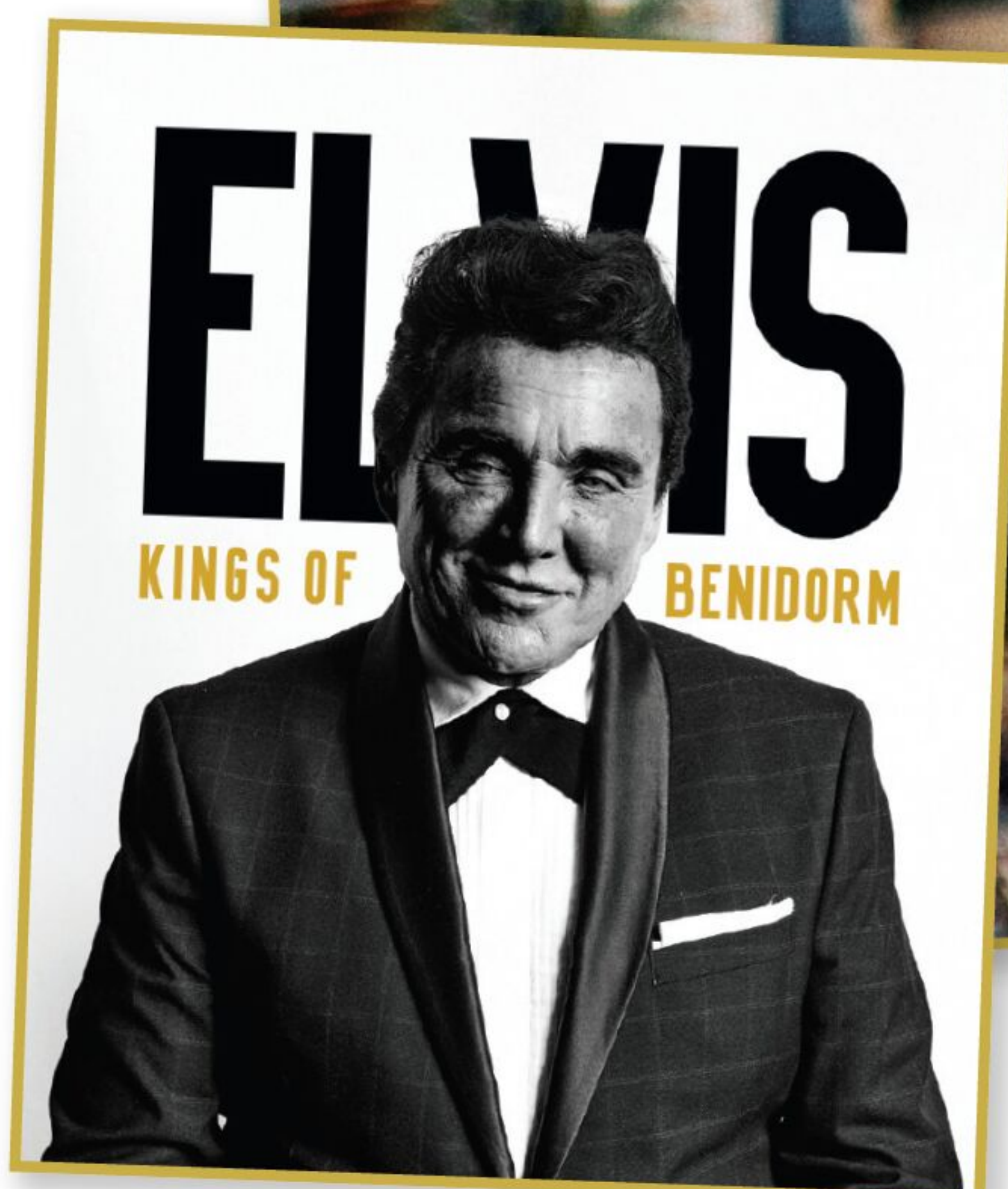
For one, they were all big characters and from them I think I learned a lot – not only about Elvis, but also about the impersonators' journeys becoming Elvis tribute acts. It turns out that something calls out to them and they enjoy what they do. They enjoy playing the role. I think most of the people I met had that story in common.

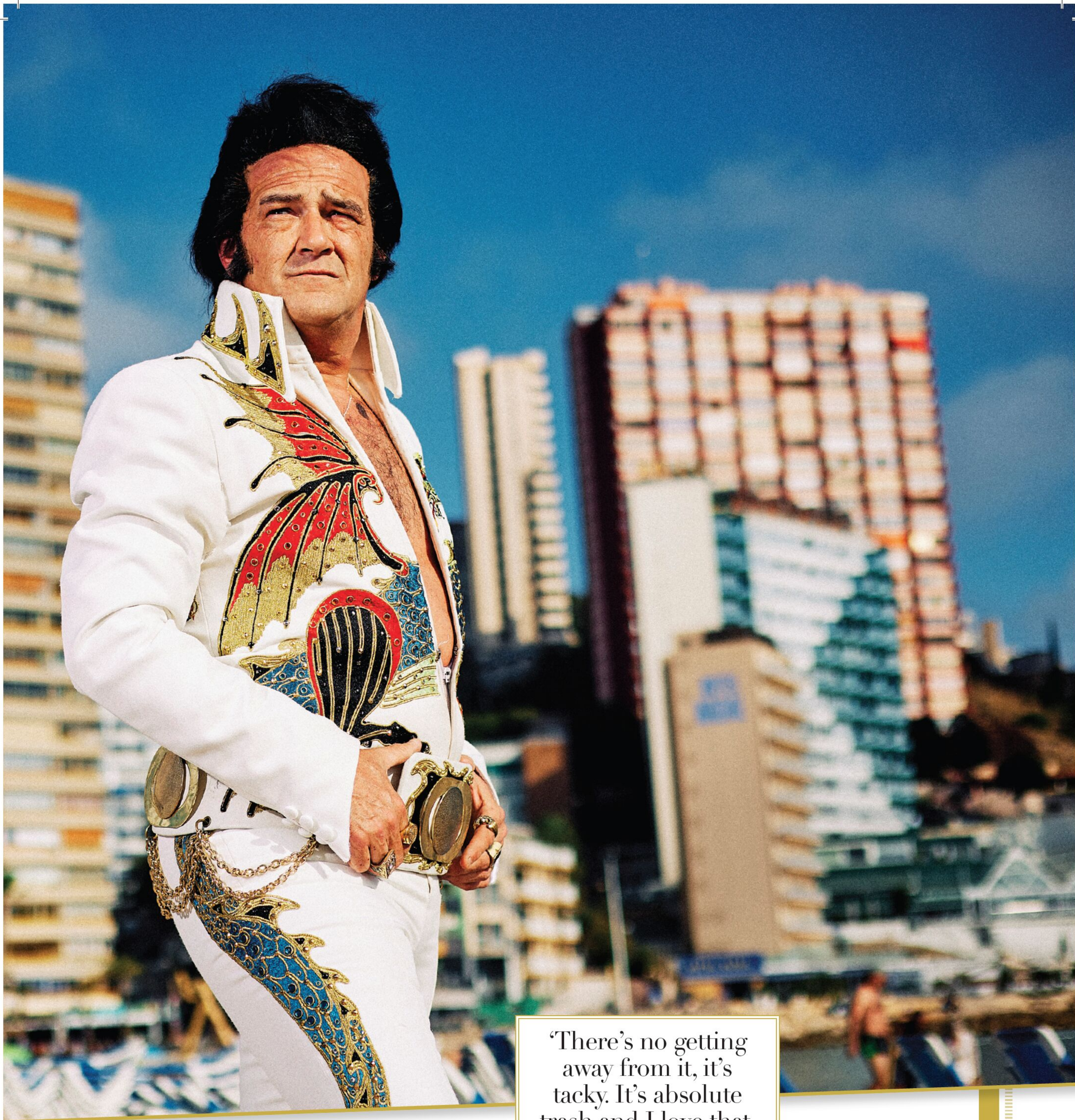
fiesta – also have that same charisma. So I think that maybe that's what is drawing people in still. They all had a love of Elvis and of singing and performing, and then it just turned into this entire career for them. My big takeaway from the experience was that it's amazing to see all these people really latch onto something that they enjoy doing and turning it into a career.

What did Elvis mean to them?

I was surprised that a lot of them didn't seem to be die-hard Elvis fanatics. They liked him, but they weren't completely crazy obsessed with him. I thought maybe more of them would be slightly over enthusiastic, as some

ELVIS GOES TO BENIDORM





‘There’s no getting away from it, it’s tacky. It’s absolute trash and I love that. And sometimes trash can be beautiful’

people can be, but I think for them Elvis was just this amazing performer who was versatile and had a life full of ups and downs. They also identified with different eras of Elvis – some could be young Elvis, some older Elvis, or Vegas Elvis or military Elvis. They were all able to channel different times in Elvis’s life.

Over the years you have photographed many high-profile stars – do you have a favourite?

That’s hard to say, of course. But I guess my favourite subjects to photograph have been the

ones that had a connection with when I was a kid – I really enjoyed shooting James Van Der Beek and Joshua Jackson because *Dawson’s Creek* was my favourite TV show when I was young. There are stars who aren’t necessarily the most famous celebrities but were amazing when I was young, which still sort of resonates with me.

Was it different photographing the Elvises?

Not really. I mean, it’s the same technique. Actually photographing the Elvises is very similar to photographing celebs.

Benidorm is perceived as tacky but you’ve made it look beautiful. Did you like it?

Did I really? I don’t think that’s true. I think it looks just as tacky in my photographs as it does in real life. There’s no getting away from it, it’s tacky. It’s absolute trash and I love that. And sometimes trash can be beautiful.

Do you have any other similar projects lined up?

No, but I am a hundred per cent going to do this again. I loved it so much, it was just so magical. So there will be similar but

different projects lined up – maybe other performers but in a slightly different world will be the next line-up. Actually I want to keep the way it looks really similar – so have these beautiful, meaningful portraits on a white background and then these other portraits in situ to sit alongside that.

www.jonmag.com/buy/elvis-kings-of-benidorm-hardback-book

LEIGH KEILY



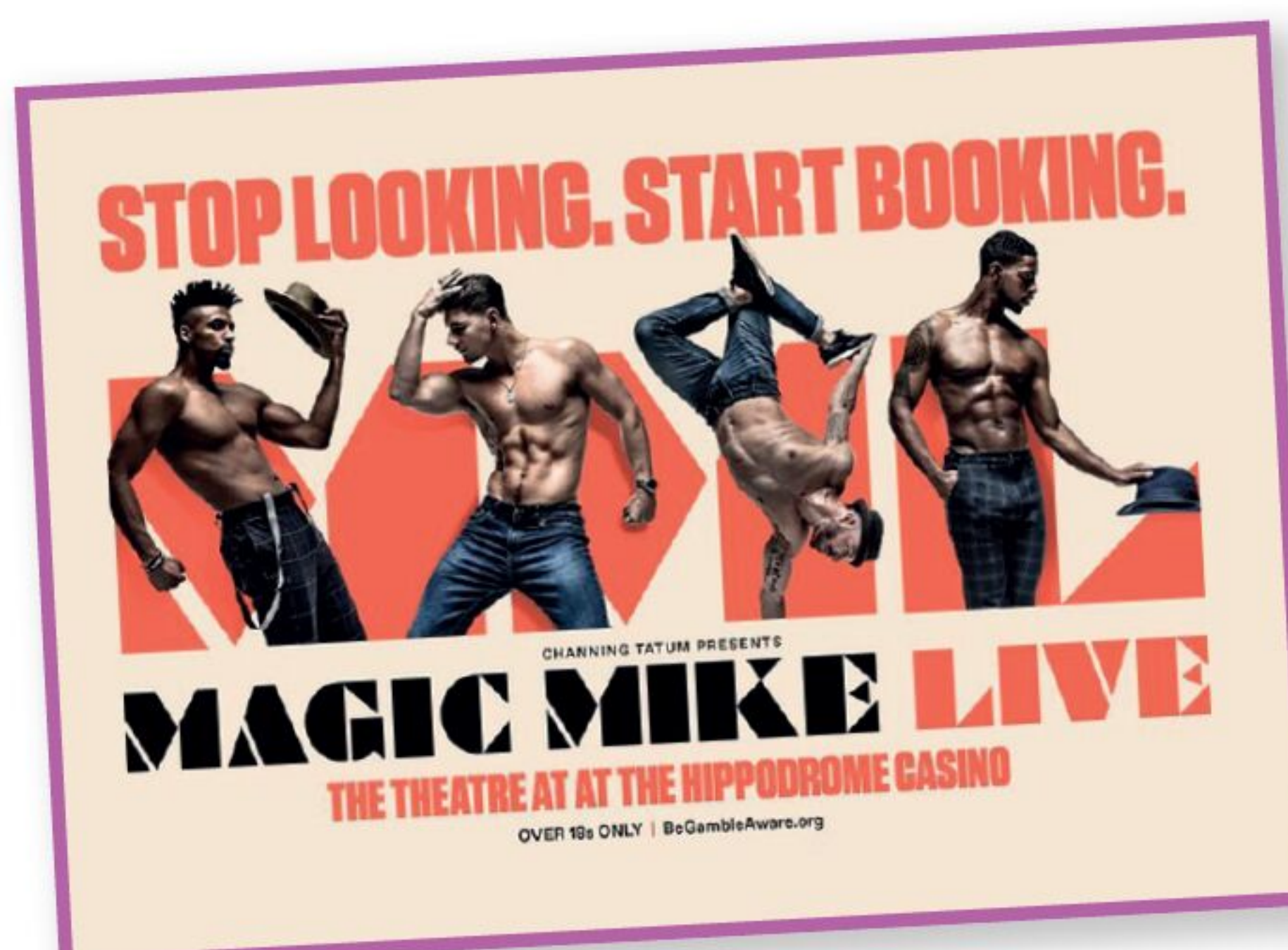
Magic Mike waves his wand in the West End

Magic Mike Live goes from strength to strength, as the steamy show is confirmed at the Hippodrome Casino until 2025

If you need to find a way to warm yourself up during these chilly winter months, what better way to do it than to get all steamy watching a bunch of buff hunks slowly and seductively slipping out of their clothes and gyrating provocatively on stage, as they run their manly hands across their taut, oiled-up bodies.

These days many joyless people may poo-poo this kind of himbo bimbo act, but it's all done in the best possible taste, with tongue firmly in cheek, and it certainly has the crowds of ravenous girls (and a few boys) packing out The Theatre at the Hippodrome Casino night after night. It's the brainchild of hunky actor Channing Tatum,

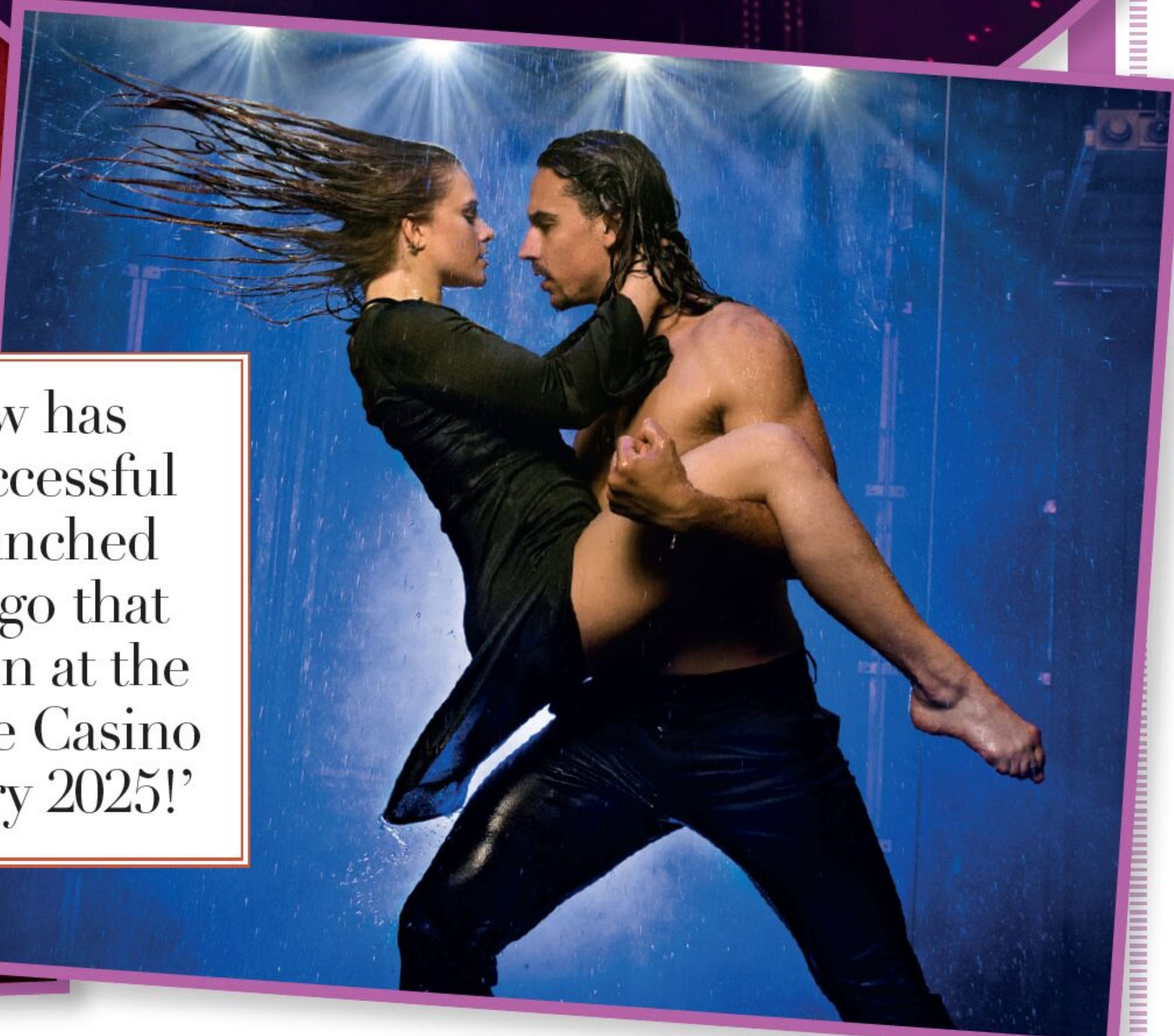
and the show has been so successful since it launched five years ago that it will remain at the Hippodrome Casino until January 2025!



The current cast of Magic Mike Live in London includes Kalon Badenhorst, Theo O Bailey, Daniel Blessing, Natacza Boon, Jake Brewer, Peter Cleverley, Kiana De Van Der Schueren, Joel Ekperigin, Petr Fedorovskii, Luca Figarazzi, Antony Franz, Eleanor-Rose Fusaro, Myles Harper, James Percy, Charlotte Perry, Josie Rose, Ross Sands, Shane Scarth and Manny Tsakanika.

Although it is unlikely to win any snooty theatre awards, the show has been a labour of love for Channing Tatum, who starred in the series of films and has wowed over 500,000 people in London alone and more than 1,250,000 worldwide.

magicmikelondon.co.uk



‘The show has been so successful since it launched five years ago that it will remain at the Hippodrome Casino until January 2025!’

Permission Bar; Hippodrome

If you're planning on seeing the show but are a tad nervous about watching a parade of strapping male dancers strut their stuff and wave their taut, muscular, greased-up bods in your face, then you may want to steel your nerves by dropping into Permission at the Casino! There you can sink into a blue velvet couch while sipping on a cocktail and listening to a live group perform popular tunes.

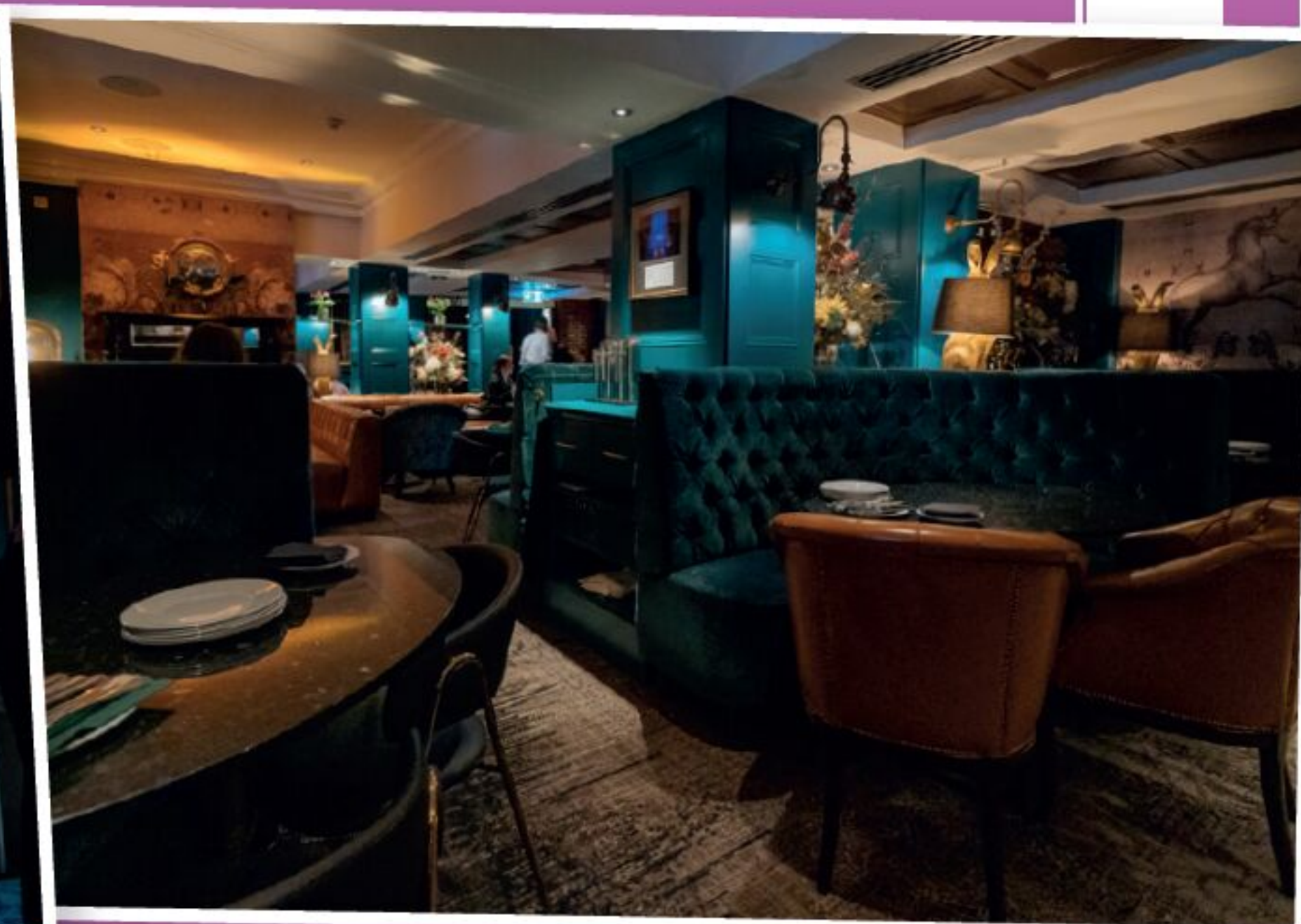
The cocktails are inspired by Magic Mike's philosophies and have been given names that will inspire confidence. Among the cocktails you can savour are Magic, comprised of Tanqueray gin, Singani 63, St Germain Elderflower, lemon, honey, and electric dust; Charismatic, a fruity delight made up of Ketel One

Citroen, Singani 63, Mandarin Napoleon, raspberry, lime, and ginger; and Confident, a decadent beverage that mixes Bulleit Rye, Dubbonet, Singani 63, lavender, orange, bitters and cherrywood smoke.

If you want to ensure the tantalising booze doesn't go to your head you can

choose from a tongue-teasing menu that features tasty cheese or charcuterie boards as well as favourites like hand-cut chips dusted with truffle seasoning.

When the show is about to begin, guests are escorted to their couches, by the edge of the cabaret-style theatre.



MATT CROCKETT, ALEXANDRU COMAN



Christmas in Covent Garden

Sample the best London has to offer in the festive season

Regular visitors to the Piazza in Covent Garden will know that when it comes to Christmas magic, it is second to none. Not only does its legendary light-festooned tree stand tall on the cobbled street in front of The Actor's Church, the iconic Market Building has been adorned with magical decorations. On November 7, over 40 gigantic bells with bows, 12 giant baubles and eight spinning mirror

balls were unveiled to captivated crowds who flocked to see the lights being switched on. Back by popular demand is the Christmas Sleigh, a traditionally decorated and reconditioned 1884 carriage that has been hand painted by British artist James Gemmill. For the past few years it has provided visitors filled with the spirit of Christmas with a photo opportunity. (Note, the sleigh is roped off from 9pm to 9am.)

A stone's throw from the Piazza, Seven Dials Market plays host to some festive specials courtesy of its traders, including themed dishes, festive cocktails and a winter warmer at the Warehouse Bar!

If you stand at the centre of Seven Dials itself, lose yourself in the lighting display that lines each of the streets that lead off it. And if you get peckish during your stroll, try these delightful eateries to satisfy your hunger...



SUSHISAMBA Festive menu – Japan meets Brazil via Peru

Not only is the restaurant festooned with stunning decorations, patrons can enjoy a unique mix of Japanese cuisine, where the sushi is made fresh to order, as well as Brazilian and Peruvian cuisine, with many of the mouthwatering dishes cooked over a robata grill. The seasonal menu, which runs until January 3, includes choices such as octopus tiradito, black cod anticuchos, Japanese wagyu maki, samba kaiseki, robata-grilled fillet mignon and arroz de lagosta. sushisamba.com

Whittard Of Chelsea Christmas tastings

If you're in the mood for something warm and festive, pop in to Whittard in the Market Building for a series of Christmas tastings that include Ginger Snap Oolong Chai (until Christmas Eve), Mulled Wine Infusion (until Christmas Eve), Christmas Tea (until Christmas Eve), Gingerbread Hot Chocolate (until December 17) and Luxury Hot Chocolate (December 18-24). whittard.co.uk





Frenchie

If you're feeling a little fancy and chic then perhaps try Frenchie's super cool Christmas menu with a Parisian twist that fuses fresh, seasonal ingredients and classic French techniques with bursts of eclectic, international flavours.

Walk through a doorway festooned with a forest of festive garlands, before enjoying pre-feast snacks including indulgent Parmesan gougères with hazelnut craquelin or Frenchie's famous bacon scones with maple syrup and Cornish clotted cream.

Starters include a beautiful British heirloom tomato tart, stracciatella and berries, while those who love tradition will enjoy the truffled foie gras pressé. For mains, you can savour the vaduovan stuffed chicken breast or Old Spot pork loin and pair with a side of roasted heritage carrots, Désirée potatoes and wild rocket and then finish up the evening with a generous slice of banoffee pie! frenchiecoventgarden.com

Ivy Market Grill

For Christmas, this Covent Garden hotspot – on the corner of Henrietta Street and Southampton Street – has curated a special festive menu. The festive breakfast menu includes a choice of smoothies, bircher muesli and a breakfast take on some Christmas dinner classics, like the pigs in blankets served with scrambled eggs, potato hash and roasted tomatoes. For an afternoon or evening festive meal, The Ivy Market Grill offer starters of smoked salmon, and duck parfait, followed by the star of the show, the goose and turkey shepherd's pie main course.

With a range of wines and cocktails, one thing is for sure – you will leave having had a very merry Christmas indeed. theivymarketgrill.com



Tuttons

With its outside area, Tuttons is one of the most popular restaurants in the square during the warmer months. However, when Christmas comes around, its festive decorations cause quite the stir. In addition to its general and varied menu, patrons seeking some holiday nourishment can feast on a delicious roast turkey crown with cranberry stuffing, honey-roasted parsnip soup and traditional Christmas pudding from their festive menu, as you look out across the iconic Piazza at the sprinkling of festive attractions. tuttons.com



Pivot Bar and Bistro

Award-winning chef Mark Greenaway's recently opened flagship restaurant Pivot Bar and Bistro is a delight. As you look out across the Piazza at the Covent Garden Christmas tree, tuck into a choice of starters that include cream of chestnut soup with candied chestnut crumble and sourdough toast, or the Scottish smoked salmon with black spiced cream. Then, for your main, you can devour roast turkey with sage and onion stuffing and cranberry sauce, or pan-roasted cod with argula oil and caperberry sauce, as well as many other options. To round the night off, why not get stuck into a scrummy Christmas pudding with brandy sauce, washed down with a warming glass of mulled wine. 3henrietta.com



The biggest names at the hottest events
around Covent Garden and Soho



Girls Aloud's
Nadine Coyle



Suggs with Paul
Strank MBE



James Pritchett and
Beverley Turner



Dame Arlene Phillips



Dawn and
Phil Tufnell



Shayne Ward and
Sophie Austin



Tsemaye Bob-Egbe



Philip Glenister and
Karen Sugarman

Paul Strank Roofing charity gala

Irene and Paul Strank were thrilled to host another gala for the Paul Strank Charitable Trust, which funds projects around the country.

Where: Royal Garden Hotel,
Kensington High Street

Website: www.paulstrankroofing.co.uk/paul-strank-charitable-trust



Irene and
Paul Strank



Lizzie Cundy



Neil Sinclair and
Christopher Biggins



Milly Zero and
Scott Maslen



Ola and James
Jordan



Heidi Range



Lana Summer



Matt Lucas



Claire Sweeney



Dr Ranj Singh



Amira Arasteh



Scott Mills and Sam Vaughan



Ben Ofoedu



Anna Norton and Joe Warren Plant



Chad Beguelin and Matthew Sklar



Andrew and Sophia Castle



Austin Riley and Oliver Ravelini

ELF The Musical press night

Matt Lucas, Dr Ranj Singh, Scott Mills and Claire Sweeney were among the stars enjoying some festive fun at the press night of *ELF The Musical*. It tells the story of Buddy, who was mistakenly raised as an elf, and runs at the Dominion until January 6.

Where: Dominion Theatre

When: November 23

Website: elflondon.com

last orders

‘My mum would love me to write a West End musical!’

Louis Eliot talks about the mighty return of '90s band Rialto and his dreams of penning a theatre smash!

Cast your minds back to the glorious days of 1997, a time when Britpop was still going strong. Oasis, Blur and Pulp continued to make headlines and produce amazing songs, and Spice Girls fever had gripped the world. Meanwhile, a suavely dressed indie combo called Rialto were quietly emerging with their beautifully haunting and cinematic debut *When We're Together*, an ethereal John Barry-esque anthem that had critics raving, with the *NME* predicting they'd achieve the same level of success as

Oasis. However, in spite of their anthemic follow-ups *Monday Morning 5:19* and *Untouchable* making a huge impact on the charts, record company politics led to the band being dropped by their label EastWest just before the release of their heavily promoted debut album.

But that didn't stop them eventually releasing two albums and a beloved EP and enchanting a generation of fans, who have kept the band alive in their minds, ever hopeful for a reunion. And 26 years later, their dreams have come true as Rialto – led by the dashing

handsome and charismatic Louis Eliot – are to play The Lexington in London in January, following a headline-grabbing gig at the recent Shiiine On Weekender at Butlins Minehead. *In & Around* Covent Garden's editor Christian Guilteneane, a huge fan of the band, caught up with Louis to chat about the group's comeback and, well, to be a total fanboy!

Louis, it's so good to have you back after all this time. You must be so excited about the gig in January...

Yes, we're playing The Lexington on January 26. We were invited to reform for the Shiiine On Weekender and the show went down a storm.

But there's a slightly different line-up, isn't there?

Yes, Julian, the bass player, and I are back but we've been joined by a few new members because the others are working all over the world. We're all still in touch and still mates. Toby the keyboard player is a full-time member of The Stranglers now and is in Australia, while Johnny's in Portugal. But the sound is still Rialto of old. It sounds sort of authentic. I think the spirit's the same.

Not only did you treat fans to your hits at Shiiine, you also played a couple of new songs, including one called *No One Leaves This Discotheque Alive...*

Yes, it went down as an absolute storm. Normally when you try a new song at a gig, you usually hear a collective groan, but everyone seemed to love it. We'd written the song, had a great rehearsal and decided to give it a go. It got this incredible cheer from the crowd that was just so heartening. It was just a really fantastic, lovely affirming sound. The songs are slightly different to what we were doing 20 years ago but they fit within the character of Rialto.

Your first album is available on streaming services, but your follow-up *Night On Earth* and the EP *Girl On A Train* aren't. Are you planning to make these albums available?

Because all our music came out prior to streaming – and we had such a difficult history with labels where they buy and sell each other – we're currently trying to find out who owns the rights to what and what we're allowed to put up. So we're working on it.

Let's look back to when Rialto first emerged. What was your concept for the band? The sound was very John Barry, very Bond-esque...

That was certainly a dream to write anything in that style. From a very early age, I loved big tunes. I remember hearing the Sex Pistols' version of *My Way* for the first time. I'd never heard the original and just thought it was fantastic. It had attitude but also this fantastic melody. I think I've always had a taste for a dramatic sound that veers into camp. You know, big unashamed



'From a very early age, I loved big tunes,' Louis tells us





'I remember that period as a really golden part of my life,' Louis says of the Britpop years

tunes. John Barry wrote some incredible music for the Bond films and I loved those. So we made music that had more of a colourful, orchestral sound.

Yes, the songs were pure class. And even the band name has an air of sophistication. Where did that come from?

Somebody said to me: 'What's the band about?' And I told them we were making the kind of music that would sound great performed in a grand old theatre with old worn red velvet seats. And she said: 'Oh, like the old Rialto?' which was an old cinema in the West End, and I was like: 'That's exactly it.' Then, coincidentally, I read that John Barry had worked as a projectionist at the Rialto Cinema in York, which his dad owned, and that was where his desire to make great film music came about.

Your videos were always rather cinematic, like *When We're Together*...

That was our idea. We worked with a brilliant guy called Alex Hemming and I used Hitchcock and other things from the period as references, and he completely got it. It's always nice to work with somebody that you're in tune with.

Funny you should mention Hitchcock – have you ever thought of writing a musical thriller using Rialto songs?

My mum's always been on at me to write a musical. I can't pretend to be a massive musical theatre buff, but I love the idea of one day doing something like that. It's a dream ambition. I don't know if I'll ever get to do that.

Back in those days, you had some success, but not quite the success you possibly deserved. Do you look back and wish things had been slightly different in terms of the band's fortunes?

I think there's an enormous amount of luck that's needed in this business. I think we were incredibly lucky to get the breaks that we got. There were a few comical twists, like getting dropped twice by the same label, but I've never allowed myself to feel any sort of bitterness or regret. We fulfilled all of our childhood dreams of being on *Top Of The Pops*, touring and all of that kind of stuff. We had a great laugh. When it all came to an end, there was a little bit

of a readjusting period. But I've done lots since like solo work, writing with other artists and playing guitar in Grace Jones' band for the last 13 years, which has been incredible.

Were the Britpop years a massive party?

It was a really fun, friendly time. There was healthy rivalry and stuff with other bands but it was all friendly and I remember that period as a really golden part of my life.

'The [new] songs are slightly different to what we were doing 20 years ago but they fit within the character of Rialto'

Despite your moderate success in the UK, Rialto had a lot of success overseas...

South Korea was the biggest one. These days it's on the cultural map but back then it wasn't so much. So when we heard that we were going there – and remember this was pre-Google – we didn't really know anything about the place. It was only when we were on the flight

and arriving there to be greeted like proper pop stars that we realised what was happening and it became a lot of fun.

So how have you ended up working with Grace Jones?

When I was a teenager I was in a band with Andi Oliver, who is now a TV chef, and her brother Sean. They were a Ladbroke Grove band, where my mum lived. And a couple of people in that band went on to work with Grace. But there's another weird connection. I was in a wedding band at the wedding of one of my cousins, who is a film composer. Grace was also there so we decided to play *Pull Up To The Bumper*. She decided to get up and join us and she really got into it. It was hilarious and surreal as I was a huge fan.

Afterwards, I said to Grace and her manager: 'If you ever need a guitar player, I would absolutely love to do it.' And then five years later I got asked to do it and that was 13 years ago! She is brilliant! Yes, she's a diva, but I'd be hugely disappointed if she wasn't!

Where: The Lexington.

When: January 26. rialtomusic.com

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